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THE SPACE GAMER

THE MAGAZINE OF ADVENTURE GAMING

SPECIAL
COMPUTER
ISSUE

PLAYING *THE WARP FACTOR*



COMPANY REPORT:
STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS
LORD BRITISH SPEAKS
COMPUTERS TO GO
THE BEEP-BOOP MENACE
TRIPLANETARY SCENARIO

RUMORS IN TRAVELLER
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THE SPACE GAMER

NUMBER 39 - MAY, 1981

IN THIS ISSUE

We got a number of favorable comments on our first "special computer issue" eight months ago - so here we go again. In general, the response to "these" issues has been good, you can look for more of them.

Depending on how you count, we have six or nine computer-game items in this issue. That ought to be enough to satiate most of the people who have a disc-drive where their heart should be. Other features include a story by Timothy Zahn (who is getting to be a regular both here and in *Analog*), a Triplanetary scenario to play with the stoezy; a strategy article for *Ice War*, a *Traveller* piece, and, for the fantasy fans, the Magic Contest sources and Lewis Palatpher's discourse on traps.

And, as you can see, we managed to keep it at 40 pages again this time. The advertisers are the ones making it possible - let them know where you read about their products.

Until next month, then.

-Steve Jackson



Publisher: Steve Jackson
Editor: Forrest Johnson
Art Director: Dennis Loubet
Contributing Editors:
William A. Barton
Ronald Pebr
Nick Schuessler
Bruce F. Webster
Business Manager: Elton Frell
Circulation Manager: Aaron Allston
Utility Infiltrator: Elizabeth Barrington

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Been a frustrating month around here. Not that everything has gone wrong — but too many things have gone not-quite-right. I can't decide whether to scream or just regress into infancy. I think the latter course would be advisable. The writing style is easier, anyway:

See the new issue of *Space Gamer*. It has just come back from the printers. Steve and Forrest are very proud of it. They are reading it. Read, Steve and Forrest, read.

Look, Steve and Forrest, look. There is a column missing from the survey. There is a typo in the contest. Isn't that funny?

Look at Steve and Forrest beat their heads against the wall. They are wonder-

Where We're Going

ing why they didn't study accounting instead. They should know there is no accounting for people like them. Look, look.

See the Postal Service. See the ace trucks and boxes and offices full of bag gage smashers. Look, look. There goes another package of *Space Gamers*. Smash, postman, smash.

Look, look. See the bag of *Space Gamers*? Shall we delay this a month like we usually do? How about two months?

Oh, look. See the pretty ad? The ad is for *Cardboard Heroes*. Steve thinks that we will delay this magazine a month like we usually do. Let's fool Steve. Steve will appreciate the joke. Let's get every one of these suckers delivered this week. Then everybody will answer the ad. Fun, fun.

See Dennis paint. Paint, Dennis, paint. Dennis is painting *Cardboard Heroes*. Dennis

is two weeks behind schedule. Paint, Dennis, paint. Paint, Dennis, paint. Paint, Dennis, paint! Remember, they have to be perfect. See Steve scream. Aaaaaaahh!

Look, look. See Chad and Aaron. Chad and Aaron have a new jacket for Steve. It is white. See the funny jacket. Okay, guys, this has gone far enough. I'm better now, honest. Look, look. Steve is all better. Really...

Thanks. I needed that.

As you may have gathered, the *Heroes* are a little late and the magazines carrying the announcement traveled (for once) quite quickly. I'm writing this on April 1, which gives me a perfect cut if this prediction turns out wrong — but I think we'll still ship the new *Heroes* in April, which puts us just barely on schedule. However, we didn't intend to have anyone waiting more than 2-3 weeks between sending in their money and getting their *Heroes*. Gripe, gripe. As for the other projects:

CAR WARS is an almost-final form. It has gone through two successful pre-publication tournaments — one at Dulon and one at Aggiecon. As we hoped, it definitely takes over the players' minds. By next week we will have gotten the final typeset version worked out, and Dennis will be working on the cars. (This one will have full-color auto pictures on the counters.)

VAMPIRE now gets off the shelf and onto the typewriter. I'm looking forward to a couple of solid night-hour rule-drafting sessions; we know how the game works, it's just a matter of detail.

Look for both of these games by late May or mid-June, if all goes well.

That makes it time to start thinking of the next batch of projects. One item we've been brainstorming for the past few days is a set of fantasy-game floor plans: a set of rooms at standard sizes that you

Next Issue

Issue 40 will be a special Traveller issue with a new space combat system;

A game account by Marc Miller,

Jack Vance's "Planet of Adventure" done up complete with maps, aliens and scenarios;

A featured review of Triplanetary.

The winners of the nonhuman race contest;

Also, a featured review of Chasnum's Dragon Pass.

Our cumulative index.

And some inefficiency of capsule reviews.



could lay on the table to aid in play. Requirements: (1) Each set would need to be pretty big — say, 35-40 rooms each, with rooms from 1" x 1" all the way to 8" x 10". (2) They have to look nice — realistic stone flooring, in color, with a grid pattern and code lettering overall to let GMs code locations in each room. (3) They ought to be erasable, so a GM can draw new walls or doors as he likes (in grease pencil, for instance) and wipe them off again. (4) They have to be cheap — less than \$5 per set.

If we can pull this off, you'll hear about it. The product as described would be the best thing on the market — better than the cheap stuff, much cheaper than the other "pretty" alternatives. If we can't do it at a reasonable price, though,

we won't do it at all.

Other upcoming products.
GAME DESIGN THEORY AND PRACTICE. The series of TSG articles is winding down — only two or three more, I think. Once the series has finished, we'll re-edit all the articles, add new information, and publish them in book form. It might even be a two-volume job. I've got some tables and information that would be about half of you people out of your minds — so they won't do for TSG — but they might make a very useful for-designers-only book. Look for the first volume about Omega, and the second one (if ever) sometime later.

THE BEST OF TSG, VOLUME ONE. Eventually, I want to reprint all the "good stuff" from the early, out-of-print

issues of TSG. The project is underway but moves very slowly. Maybe by Omega, but probably not.

CARDBOARD HEROES, SETS 5-7. Available in 4 months, give or take. Right now it looks like Set 5 will be Unleashed, and sets 6 and 7 will be Monsters... bad-dicks, golems, elementals, octopi, weird-creatures, demons, and other man-sized nasties. Unless, of course, we get something else drawn first. Suggestions appreciated, as always.

NEW GAMES. We're working on several. Right now I don't know which ones are going to get to completion first, so I'll keep my mouth shut.

I think that should do it for this month. With us we'll. See Steve matter...

— Steve Jackson

GAME MASTER

GAME MASTER exists to answer questions on your favorite games. If you have a rules question or play problem, send it in. Questions to be answered will be chosen on the basis of general interest. They will be first referred to the game publisher or designer. If no response is received, **GAME MASTER** will offer its own interpretation of the rule. Sorry — no individual replies are possible.

Traveler

As an RPG character-to-player-turned-gamer-referee, I have a few questions concerning GDM's *Traveler*. Say, for instance, a party of adventurers is exploring an installation. For exploration purposes, how would you determine how far a character could move in one turn? Also, how do you determine the passage of game time? In D&D, one turn equals one minute of game time, with the average human being able to move 110' in the same time. I wasn't sure if *Traveler* was run on the same basis or not. Could you please help me with this problem?

— Patrick V. Rayns

GDM's *Lozan* *Wizards* replies: *Is that really the movement rate for D&D? That's FIVE FEET QUOTE PER FOOT* What are they moving through, obstacle tump?

In *Traveler*, turns are 15 seconds long, and a character can move 45 meters in one turn (that's a brisk walk). Running, characters can move twice that. Distinctions should be made from this rule according to the type of terrain covered, number of endurance points used up, circumstances, and so on. For 15-second minutes, we suggest a scale of 1 inch to three meters.

DragonQuest

Book 1: Why is it harder to be a halfling than to be an elf or dwarf, if halflings are the most numerous of the three? Also, on page 24, section 20, it states that "A character can choose Rank with base hands in the same manner as for a weapon." Yet, nowhere in the rules does it give an experience point cost for achieving such Rank.

Book 2: On page 12, the Spell of Invulnerability

(G-8) does not have a Base Chance given. What should it be?

Book 3: On page 4, section 48.4, the Base Chance for all skills is listed as (50+3)/Rank/5. As this makes skills harder to use as Rank is achieved, I assume that it should be (50+3)/Rank/5. Is this correct? Sections 50.4 (page 5) and 50.8 (page 6) each give a different formula for the cost of a poison. Which, if either, is correct, and what should the general cost of a prepared poison be (to someone who is neither an Alchemist or an Assassin)? Does SPI really expect players with Astrologer characters to slaughter a goat in the GM's living room (to read its entrails)? In section 28.2 (page 12), the riding ability of the military scientist is given as 30+5/Rank. Should this be 30+3/Rank? Should the Running speed in section VIII be in feet or yards (it says feet, but yards seem to be most accurate).

General: When will the errata for the first edition of *DragonQuest* be available, and how can we get it? When will the revised edition be out?

— William A. Peterson



DragonQuest design chief David Ehrhart answers:

1. In answer to your question concerning the comparative difficulty of becoming a halfling in *DragonQuest*, I would point out that while halflings may outnumber dwarves and elves in terms of total population in a *DragonQuest* world, halfling adventures will not be driven too thickly upon the ground. The species is supposedly given to the leading of lives of quiet mediocrity, not to the doing of great deeds and the seeking out of the dangerous and the unknown. Accordingly, if you want to be a halfling, your chances of overcoming your nature and going out on "adventures" (nasty thing!) will be smaller than for members of other races.

2. The Experience Multiple for unarmed combat proficiency is 150. There is a limit of 20 to the Rank achievable with bare hands (i.e. it is treated as a Skill).

3. The Base Chance for a Spell of Invulnerability (G-7) is 45%.

4. The entire passage in 48.4 is incorrect. The passage should read as follows: A character usually has a chance of failure when using a non-surgical skill. Unless the ability is described or as an exception to this rule, the maximum chance is accorded with it. It is never greater than (50+3)/Rank/5. A character always fails to use an ability if the roll is greater than the modified chance or 100 (regardless of Rank).

5. Actually both are correct. The cost listed in 50.4 is the cost of all materials and substances necessary to manufacture a single dose of poison (a 30% markup will give you the cost to purchase such an item from an Alchemist). The cost listed in 50.8 is for the prime ingredient in each poison and each item (poison as is) will produce D10-D10 doses of poison. Note that these are averages, however. An extremely potent, but very rare, substance (the poison of a Black Widow, for example) will bring a higher price than something which is almost as potent but very common.

6. On the subject of slaughtering goats, any sort of random system of fortune telling is preferable to turning the GM's livingroom into an abattoir. I suggest a set of tarot cards as being one of the most interesting and colorful ways of telling a fortune in a *DragonQuest* campaign. It has the additional benefit of not being frowned on by either the *Fund for Animals* or the *ASPCA*.

7. We emphasized the riding ability of the Military Scientist, as you remarked. It should be 30+3/Rank.

8. All running speeds should be in yards. As you point out, yards is a more accurate measure in this case.

9. We now have first edition errata for *DragonQuest* available which can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed letter to me at SPI (237 Park Avenue South/New York, New York 10014). A revised version of one of the three books is being packaged in all *DragonQuest* currently being shipped and revisions are planned for the other two books as well when they individually come up for reprinting (probably by mid-summer). By early fall we expect to have all existing errata input directly in the rules.



FANTASY WORLD

by Timothy Zahn

The battle had been short and furious, and now the last two enemy starships hovered like vultures just outside of blaster range. His fingers resting lightly on the control keys, John Davis had the eerie feeling that they were watching him, waiting for him to lower his guard before launching that final lethal attack. But he knew better than to be killed, and even as he watched the ships began to move.

Inexperienced warriors usually wasted power by firing as soon as the targets were within range. John resisted that temptation and instead waited until the ships had committed themselves to definite attack trajectories. The first took a simple hyperbolic course, and John got it before it came within fifty thousand kilometers. The second's path was trickier, though, and John wanted two shots before realizing it was a logarithmic spiral. After that, calculating an intercept course was easy, and a single torpedo did the trick.

Leaning back in his chair, John stared at the empty screen with a sense of frustration. It had been too easy. Again.

Parker, the red-haired kid at the next terminal, glanced up and misinterpreted John's expression. "Smarter, Davis? They got you?"

"Don't be silly." Tapping a key, John watched as the computer prided his score.

Parker whistled. "Eighteen ships blasted in a minute and a half. And with only twenty-two shots and a third of your fuel. Boy, how gloomy do you look when you lose something?"

"You weren't paying attention yesterday, were you?"

"Yesterday? You mean — *aw*, you didn't bomb another chem test, did you?"

"'Fraid so. You wouldn't want me to ruin my streak, would you?"

Parker shook his head. "I've never seen anyone as smart as you who has so much trouble with tests. How come?"

"I don't know," John shrugged, uncomfortable with the subject. "I freeze up whenever I'm going to be graded on something. I suppose I've been like that since elementary school."

"Well, cheer up and look on the bright side. Computer games still aren't a required course."

"Very funny." John scowled at the screen. "They might as well be, though. It's grating to be as boring as that class. This is supposed to be one of the hardest games on the machine and I've already beaten it eight times."

"Running out of challenges, huh? Well, let's see. Have you tried *Clutter War*?"

"Yes. Also *Deep Probe*, *After Survival*, and *Atomion*. I can beat all of them practically blindfolded. I've even won *Suicide Attack* five times."

Parker shook his head in rueful admiration. "It's people like you that discourage all the rest of us. I haven't *ever* beaten *Suicide Attack*. Ah, I know — how about the new one on Index Four called *Black Ark*?"

John frowned. "Never heard of it. Index Four, you say?"

Parker nodded. "I haven't tried it myself yet, but I hear it's one of those games where you wish you had a tree handy to bang your head against. Have fun." He

turned back to his own game.

"Thanks," John braced himself at the keyboard for a few moments, and soon the screen began to fill up with words.

Blockade: A Game Of Escape And Survival

You are trapped on a world of the double star Leta. A fleet of enemy fighters lies in orbit around the two stars, out of range of ground-based defenses. You must elude enemy attacks and reach the edge of the screen in order to win.

It sounded mildly interesting. John typed for the rules and read them with growing excitement. Everything had been set up with an eye toward realism: stellar masses, distances, and revolution speeds were carefully defined; ship capabilities in speed, weaponry, and defense were spelled out in detail. Even the drag effects of the stellar atmospheres had been included.

Altogether, the rules and control options took up six pages, and John took a few minutes after he finished reading to review them in his mind. Calling up the "game board," he studied the layout for a moment. His starting point, the rules said, was a planet of the smaller star, Leta B. That star's red giant companion, Leta A, sat a few inches away on the screen, its atmosphere indicated by a hazy ring surrounding it. The enemy fighters were nowhere to be seen. More as an experiment than anything else, John launched a ship into a simple hyperbolic course.

Out of nowhere a ship appeared, moving on an intercept course. A dot moved between the blips, and John's ship flared and vanished. The fighter turned back and disappeared.

Frowning, John launched another ship and another, and another. No matter what course was used one or more fighters always appeared and successfully intercepted the escaping craft. But where were they coming from? Or was that randomized?

He finally got it on the tenth shot. "Ahh!" he muttered in triumph.

Parker looked up. "Win it already?"

"Hardly. I've figured out where these fighters are based. They're coming from the two Lagrangian points of the double star."

"I gather that's good?"

"At least I know where to watch for them. I still think it's cheating to let them vanish instead of going back to their nests, though."

Parker watched in silence as John launched another ill-fated ship. "Maybe the fighter isn't disappearing," he sug-

gested. "Maybe they're just coasting, and are being considered as invisible when their drives are off."

"Let's see." John fired another ship, this time allowing it to coast after an initial impulse. Sure enough, the ship vanished; but as the attacking fighter neared its projected position, it reappeared and was quickly destroyed.

"What the hell?" Parker growled.

"I get it," John nodded. "The fighter's detection gear is good enough to pick me up if they come close, even when my drive is off."

"That's dirty pool. They at least should have warned you about that."

"Oh, I don't mind. It adds to the game."

John turned back to his keyboard. It was now going to be largely a matter of trial and error to find a path that would enable him to escape the fighters. For a moment he wished the game allowed the extra freedom of a third dimension, but immediately realized that wouldn't really help him much. Leaving the elliptic plane would require too much of his drive and would therefore allow the fighters too much time to track him. What was needed was some path that could be neither tracked nor easily predicted. Settling himself more comfortably in front of the terminal, he set to work.

He had lost count of the number of ships the fighters had destroyed when he became aware of someone standing over him. He glanced up. "Oh, hi, Sandy."

"Hello, John." Her tone was cold enough to frost an orange grove. "Do you know what time it is?"

"I - aw, sure, I'm sorry. We were going to the show tonight, weren't we? Can we still make it?"

"Not now. You know I hate coming in after a movie's started." She nodded at the screen. "What is it this time, *Evanson and Casper War*?"

"Clarier," he corrected automatically. "This is a new one called *Blockade*. I have to get a basically unarmed ship through a nest of enemy fighters -"

broke off his explanation at the look on her face. "C'mon, Sandy, I really am sorry. I got some homework done early and just stayed here to play a couple of games. Trust just got away from me, that's all."

"It always does, John," she sighed, "and you always say you're sorry. But you never really are."

John felt his face getting red. "That's not fair," he complained. "You're making out like I'm some sort of liar."

"No, not a liar. An addict." Sandy pointed to the terminal. "You see that silly jump of hardware exactly as if it was a drug. Without your daily fix you can't face the real world."

"For gosh sakes, Sandy -"

"I like you a lot, John. You're intelligent, and if you put half the time into your studies that you waste on these games these're no telling how far you could go. But this obsession of yours drives me crazy. You're always cutting classes or skipping homework assignments to come here to this - this hiding place of yours. Why, John? What are you afraid of?"

His first impulse was to deflect the question, but he resisted that urge. She was right; this had happened far too often, and the least he could do was to offer her an explanation. If he could find one.

"It's not that I'm afraid of anything, exactly," he began slowly, still marshaling his thoughts. "It's more a matter of - well, look, the world is full of problems these days, problems that don't have any answers. I could beat my head against them forever and not accomplish anything. But with one of these games I can solve a problem, solve it completely. Do you understand?"

"Not really. Life is full of little problems, too; ones that aren't any bigger than that computer game you. You could be solving those instead of wasting your time and energy in this fantasy world of yours."

"Suppose I could? Nobody would in-



tem to my solutions anyway. We students are about as low on official importance lists as you can get."

"Whereas with the computer you're General John Dues, holding the fates of millions in your hands. Is that it? Is it the sense of power and prestige the games give you?"

"No, I — no —" Flustered, he tried to think. "I told you, it's the sense of accomplishment."

Sandy shook her head sadly. "But you're not accomplishing anything, don't you understand? Unless you're dealing with the real world you're just wasting time." She looked down at the floor. "I'm going back to the dorm. Are you coming with me?"

"I . . . well —"

"I didn't think so. So long, John."

"I'm really sorry about the move. I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Probably."

She left the room, not looking back. John watched her go, then turned back to his keyboard. Glancing over at Parker, who had studiously ignored the confrontation, he said, "What do you think? Am I addicted to this stuff?"

"You're not flunking, are you?" the other countered. "This is just a way of relaxing, like handball or something. Everyone needs that."

"But it's more than just recreation," John objected. "It's — oh, skip it."

For a minute he stared at the screen, his thoughts a jumbled mess. Could Sandy be right? Was he afraid to tackle the prob-

lems of the real world? He had always looked down on people who needed to escape into private fantasies — was he now becoming one himself?

Heck with it. Like everything else in life, there were no easy answers to be found. Maybe some day that would change. In the meantime . . . he had a blockade to run. Hunching forward in his chair, he resumed the game.

It was after three in the morning when he finally solved it. A three-stage slingshot effect using both stars — the large one twice — would get him past the fighter every time. "Got it," he told Parker.

"Really? Let's see." Putting his own game on "hold," Parker watched as John sent another ship along a tortuous path to safety.

ESCAPE FROM LEIX

Scenario for TRIPLANETARY

by Steve Jackson

This scenario for GDW's *Triplanetary* is based on the action in "Fantasy World" — not the actual Leix engagement as much as the game's process of solving the tactical problem as it was presented. In its basic form, the scenario is balanced against the Imperial player — once the Leix player can figure out the trick! Once a system for escape has been found, the game can be modified with the variants given at the end, making the problem progressively tougher.

Setup: There are two players. The Imperial player (red counters) sets up first, with two comets, three orbital bases, and three dummy counters. All counters are placed upside-down, stationary, on or adjacent to any asteroid hexes.

The Leix player (blue) gets ten packets. Each packet starts the game in orbit around Terra, Luna, Sol, Venus, or Mercury. These starting positions represent various possible spots near the sun Leix B. To represent the heavy planetary defenses, Sol and each inner planet may attack as an orbital base (strength 16) if an Imperial ship comes in range. Sol and the planets may not be attacked.

Substitute counters as necessary, since the game's counter mix does not include (for example) ten packets of any color.

Map changes: Mars does not exist at all. Neither do the asteroids (except as Imperial setup markers). Jupiter and its moons exist and have gravity. Sol and the

inner planets exist normally for game purposes, though they do not represent separate bodies.

Movement and Detection: All units begin the game undetected. An Imperial unit is detected when it first moves, or when a packet comes within three hexes of it. A packet is detected when it first burns fuel AFTER leaving orbit, or when it comes within 3 hexes of an Imperial ship or base. Dummies do not detect. Once a ship is detected, it stays detected unless (for a packet) it returns to an inner-system orbit, or (for an Imperial ship) a "re-set" is achieved — see below. Detection occurs at the end of movement, but before combat.

Overload, Refueling, and Repair: Packets may undergo one overload maneuver, and then require minor maintenance. The same is true of Imperial ships in the basic game. Refueling and minor maintenance takes place (for packets) in an inner-system orbit only, and (for Imperial ships) at orbital bases, or after "re-set."

Combat: Imperial comets carry one mine each, which may be replaced by rendezvous with an orbital base. Imperial bases are detection stations only, with no combat strength. Packets have a strength of 1 (as printed in the rule book) rather than 2 (as printed on the counters).

Course of the Game: Imperial units begin the game motionless, and may not move until at least one packet is detected. They may not attack, or deliberately move toward, an undetected packet. However, a packet may maneuver to avoid any Imperial unit, detected or not. This will itself cause fuel to be burned, letting the Imperials detect the ship, but can be worthwhile. The game ends when no packets are left on the board.

Reset: If at any time there are no surviving packets on the board outside the

five inner-system orbits, the Imperial player may remove all his units from the board, replace any lost dummies, and set his units up again. All units are inverted and motionless, as per the original setup rules. All ships are automatically refueled and given minor maintenance, and comets get new mines if needed. All ships are now undetected.

Victory conditions: The Imperial player seeks to destroy as many packets as possible, his own losses are not important. The Leix player seeks to get as many ships off the top of the board as possible. To successfully exit, a ship must have at least 5 fuel units (half its original stock) left, and may not be disabled. If seven or more packets successfully escape, the Leix player wins. Six is a tie. Five or fewer is an Imperial win.

Variations: Players will soon discover one or more maneuvers to allow a near-certain Leix victory. At this point, add the following complications, starting with the first and working up.

A. The Empire gets three comets.

B. Imperial ships may perform the overload maneuver as often as they like — though they must still watch their fuel use.

C. Use variations A and B together.

D. Leix packets must exit with at least SIX fuel units left.

E. Use variations A and D together.

F. Use variations A, B, and D together.

G. The Empire may trade any or all its three comets for two comets each.

H. B and G together.

I. B, D, and G together!

And so on . . . Any of the above may be further balanced in favor of the Leix player by letting packets fight at their printed value of 2 — or in favor of the Empire by turning all the packets into unarmed transports.

Leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, John watched the screen, savoring the feel of victory. This was what made these games worthwhile; this sense of accomplishment that the real world, with all its tests and grades, consistently denied him. For a moment he thought back to what Sandy had said. But the moment passed. Even though, deep within him, he knew that it was all illusion — that he had the form of triumph without the substance — he was nevertheless content. So what if he had just spent several hours on a project that held not a single iota of value for anyone else in the universe? What mattered was that he himself, John Davis, felt good about what he had done.

Settling himself comfortably, John watched the screen in happy silence.

Three hours later, twenty-two thousand miles above the Earth's surface, Captain Grusalka watched his computer screen in similar contentment as the blip throated its way around the two stars and reached the edge of the screen. "Beautiful," the translator on his belt said with clear satisfaction. "And it will work every time!"

At his side Parker nodded. "On its first pass by Letz A the ship brushes a fairly dense level of atmosphere, and a small change in the drag there makes a very large change in the final direction vector. It all really hinges on the fact that the ship is coasting and undetectable for most of its path, and that the course itself is not predictable enough for the fighters to plot a good intercept vector."

"And the only times the fighters have any real chance of intercepting before that they'll be within range of the planetary defenses. Excellent." Grusalka touched the signaler on his insignia. "Flight deck: prepare a courier ship for a deep space run; ETD four hours. Coding chief: report to Captain's quarters immediately. He smiled at Parker. "Looks like we'll finally get those stranded troop carriers back from Letz."

"Yes, sir. What's my next job, Captain?"

Grusalka handed him a small package. "It's a ground-war game called *Commando Assault*. We need to find a way to take the spaceport on Saklor with only three hundred men. Thank your boy genius has a chance!"

Parker smiled. "Certainly, sir, as long as he thinks it's a game. In fact, I'll bet you he'll have the answer in thirty-six hours."

The captain smiled in return. "I'll take that bet, Parker. I'd say at least forty-eight."

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Featured Review: The Warp Factor

by Forrest Johnson

This is the first SF offering from Strategic Simulations, the company which produced the justly-famous Computer Starwark. TWF might be classified as a Star Trek program, but it is like no Star Trek program you have seen before. In fact, it bears a more-than-suspicious resemblance to Star Fleet Battles.

Up to 10 ships can participate in a given combat. There are 12 ship types. Besides Alliance, Klingons, and Romulans (read Federation, Klingons and Romulans), you can command an outpost, starbase, Tie-fighter, X-wing (or is it a Viper?), Cydon Raider or the Millennium Falcon. The beautiful illustrations on the reference sheets could have come straight from the various shows and films. There is, however, no mention of any licensing agreement. Presumably, the publisher either has a very good legal staff, or none at all.

At any rate, the game mechanics have a familiar look. Movement is in two dimensions. There are no stars, planets or other sources of gravity to clutter up the screen. Momentum effects are minimal. Each ship has a limited turning rate and ability to accelerate. However, the heaviest dreadnought "can stop on a dime if desired." (The idea of "stopping" in space is worth a chuckle.)

Each ship has six defensive screens, arranged clockwise. To knock down other ships' screens, there are phasers, photon torpedoes, disruptors, decesses and plasma torpedoes. When the enemy's shields collapse, you can send over a boarding party via transporter. Only Romulans (oops, I mean "Romans") have cloaking devices, but anyone can use ECM to fool up the enemy's sensors.

Each player secretly allocates energy between these functions, then plots movement. The movement routine allows you to 16 separate changes of course. Weapons can fire at any point during movement, or they can be set to fire at a range, or at "last instant." There is a "set display" routine which shows 11 magnifications of the battle zone, to help you plan strategy.

A considerable range of tactics are possible. The rules mention "the J-curve," "the Fly-by," "Circuselling" and "Threading the Needle." All are attempts to bring the maximum number of guns to bear at the most opportune moment. Each is a legitimate tactic, and some of them are used by computer-controlled ships in the solo game.

A good bit of memory is apparently devoted to ship strategy. But, alas, a machine makes an unimaginative opponent. A given ship uses a given tactic regardless what it is fighting. A "Klingon" cruiser continues to J-curve at 10 megahicks a turn, even though its target is 100+ MK away and retreating.

Human opponents are better. But the computer does have one advantage — it doesn't make mistakes. If a human presses the wrong key, that's that, there is not enough error trapping. To make things worse, the computer sometimes requires a carriage return after an order, and sometimes does not. A player can easily become confused and debauches himself just an important subroutine. (Sorry! You don't get to shoot this now!)

The situation is not improved by the number of errors on the reference sheets. The computer, as Darth Vader, knows there are no type 2 droids on the Tie-fighter. A human player is left to discover this fact for himself, probably at an embarrassing moment.

At the end of each game, the computer assesses victory. Each ship has a point value ranging from 1 for a fighter to 21 for a starbase. The larger force has a big disadvantage. If you're much more powerful than your enemy, you literally can't "win," even if you blow him away without taking a hit yourself. Luke Skywalker can take on nine dreadnoughts if he chooses, he is certain to be destroyed, but even more certain to win a splendid victory.

Overall, play balance is no better than in Star Fleet Battles. Whoever decided, for example, that three Cydon Raiders are equal to a Federation cruiser should try to play it once or twice. Players will have to construct their scenarios without relying on the given point values.

Unfortunately, the creator of Computer Starwark is not on the credits. This game is SLOW in using AppleSoft Basic, and every possible programming shortcut, the designer put his own convenience ahead of the user's. For example, his use of an off-the-shelf character generator means that ships can be displayed in only four positions. (Your course is 45 degrees, but it looks like 90.) The graphics are unexciting. There is no sound and no color. The tactical nuances of this game is almost its sole attractive feature.

THE WARP FACTOR should have been named Computer Star Fleet Battles. Judging from the time the machine takes to calculate damage, I suspect the SFB damage tables were simply copied wholesale into memory. One can only wish the programmer had taken a few more liberties with his text.

Still, THE WARP FACTOR is a challenging game. Our machine was kept pretty busy by staffers who wanted to know, for example, how Captain Kirk would do against a swarm of Tie-fighters. It is slow, but it can keep your attention. And it is a good buy for the Star Fleet Battles addict who can't find an opponent.

THE WARP FACTOR (Strategic Simulations), \$39.95. A 48K AppleSoft disk by Paul Murray and Bruce D. Clayton. Box includes 12-page rulebook, 4 reference sheets, floppy disk. One or two players, playing time 1-3 hours. Published 1980.



STRATEGY

Warning at **THE WARP FACTOR** requires more than a little familiarity with the program and the ships involved. Basically, you must maneuver your ship so that your own weapons will bear on your foe's weakest shields — while ensuring that your own ship passes through few fields of fire. If you must accept fire, you want it to fall on your strong shields. If you suspect a weak shield will be fired on, you must reinforce it. All well and good . . . the problem is that shields have different values, your best weapons will usually have only a limited field of fire, and you never have enough power available. The reader is left to develop his own favorite tricks, but these few hints will speed your learning:

(1) Shield support is better than it looks. The rulebook underlines shield support. Unless you're positive you know which specific shield the enemy will hit, general support is better than reinforcement.

(2) If you have drones, use one a turn, every turn, starting as soon as the foe is within range. There is no point-bonus for saving your drones, and the sooner you

kill the enemy, the sooner he quits firing on you. Note that drones do NOT retain the velocity of the parent ship — this game has almost no momentum effects.

(3) Faced with multiple enemies, hit one at a time. Don't spread your fire unless you know that you have more than enough power to demolish a single foe. A ship which can absorb 6-point hits indefinitely may be crippled or smashed by a single 9-point blow.

(4) Practice makes perfect. Once you've run the program once or twice and looked at the pretty lights, I recommend some serious practice before you play a live foe — or even the computer — for "blood." It's very frustrating to be two hours into a tense game, fighting for your life, and then realize you don't know exactly how your ship will respond to the command you want to give. My recommendation is.

Scenario Zero: Naval Maneuvers. Before a commander takes a new ship out, he must put her through her paces in "naval maneuvers" against a friendly starbase. His weapons have been replaced by training simulators. The starbase will sit there as he maneuvers and fires at it, his bridge computer will let him know what he would have done to the starbase in a real attack. However, the starbase does not return fire, thus, the captain will

be able to test his maneuvers, firing orders, and accuracy at his leisure.

To set up this scenario, punch up a two-human game. Take a single ship of your choice, opposing a starbase. Enter your ship commands normally, when the starbase's turn comes, enter "MS / 0 / 16" to abort its turn without action. Thus, you'll have ample opportunity to test your weapons for accuracy and damage at various distances, and to find out exactly what the effective field of fire is for each of your weapons. (Warning: the reference sheets are not 100% accurate.) You can also experiment with the precise effects of some commands. Try a "fire at range 100" command at range 20, for instance. You can also punch up various levels of ECM for the Starbase, to see how your hit chances are affected by ECM with other factors remaining stable.

When you've put your ship through a couple of hours of maneuvers, you'll be ready for serious play against the computer or a live opponent. Not only will you be less likely to hit a key at the wrong time (aborting a move and blowing the turn) — you'll know just what your ship can do, and you'll give your orders quickly and efficiently, insuring yourself for tactical intensity. Good hunting.

— Steve Jackson

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Company Report:

Strategic Simulations

We were a couple of wargamers who had tired of waiting for the large game companies to invest in computer game design. Although the home computer market was small, surveys we conducted seemed to show that there were enough gamers with computers to justify starting SSI.

Early on, we realized we had to study each home computer to determine which, if any, was suitable for strategy games. Due to the small number of computer owners in general, we were forced to consider only the PET, TRS-80 and Apple. We had to answer three questions about each machine. First, is it technically possible to produce a complex wargame on the computer? Second, are there enough owners of the system who would consider purchasing our products? Third, how would we reach potential customers with our products? Contrary to the then-current beliefs of major wargame companies, we came to the conclusion that only the Apple offered all of the technical and marketing features which we required. The Apple was the only computer which offered technical advantages (16-bit color graphics, sound, and automatic chaining from one program to another), a large base of 48K disk owners, and a network of retail stores. (Radio Shack stores refused to carry anything but Radio Shack products, while small computer stores generally preferred Apple software since they did not sell TRS-80s.) Why 48K disk products only? We did not want to do a simple game with only 16K. Our experience quickly revealed that a state-of-the-art wargame requires at least 50-100K, and only Apple's cloning gave us this.

You may be wondering why I have spent so much time talking about computers. SSI is a computer game company. The selection of which computer to use was the most important decision we had to make. We would like to produce complex, high-quality games which could be used on any computer, but it is simply impractical. As an experiment, we did produce a TRS-80 version of *Computer Bismarck*, but we do not plan anything further in that line. It is possible that we

will begin converting some of our games to the Atari computer in the next year, but only if Atari sales pick up considerably.

All of us are anxiously awaiting the next breakthrough in home computers, you know, 128K RAM - built in disk drive - built in color monitor all for \$1000 to \$1500. However, we don't expect this for another 1-3 years. In the meanwhile, we have developed our own disk operating system for the Apple. It will save about 6K of memory, and speed play considerably. The new DOS will be integral to our next releases, *Troopdo Five* and thereafter.

Why all the commotion about computers? The answer involves what everyone believes a computer can do for a wargame. A computer can allow limited intelligence. Also, it can allow simultaneous movement, while doing all of the necessary bookkeeping. It can also keep the players somewhat in the dark as to the combat resolution system, taking the edge away from the mathematician wargamer (and eliminating the old 199-100 equals 1-1 syndrome). It can also keep track of map reduction and other paperwork. Possibly most importantly, the computer can provide an opponent when one finds a shortage of human players. These are the key abilities of the computer, that is if it's an IBM 3033, and that is the problem. Most, if not all, home computers cannot handle all of the above.

When we began development of a game, our first consideration is whether the game can be successfully completed within the memory limitations of the computer. Secondly, after our experience with *Computer Bismarck*, we now ask whether the computer can quickly execute its job as referee, or if not, can and should we simplify the game in order to speed it up? There is always a trade-off between realism and speed of execution.

To date, most of our games have featured limited intelligence, blind simultaneous movement, and a computer opponent. Unfortunately, we have discovered that the computer suffers from two major weaknesses. The display cannot give as

much information at a glance as a board game is able to do. Also, the process of moving a unit around on a computer screen is much more laborious than moving one on a board. Although we have tried to minimize these problems with commands which allow the player to re-see information, and which provide easy movement of units, we have not eliminated the problem. It is possible that with the use of light pens, we could simplify the movement system (just point at the unit on the screen and then point at the location you wish it to move to), but it is unlikely that enough computer owners will spend \$200 for the hardware needed. These two problems will undoubtedly continue to be the biggest thorns in the side of strategy computer gaming.

Some of our latest games have attempted to minimize the above mentioned problem. *Operation Apocalypse* uses a straightforward movement system which allows players to move units on the computer almost as easily as they would on a board. With stacking of units prohibited, the players can gain a lot, if not total, information from a glance at the display. The next step is to use the same game system and to allow stacking. *Troopdo Five* is visually oriented, with a 3D view from the sub's periscope and multiple magnification maps. Unfortunately, important statistics such as damage received and firepower strength cannot be shown on the map, but must be looked up separately.

Someday these screens we will release a Napoleonic campaign game which will feature the inability of the army commander to instantly communicate with units outside of their area of command, as well as the unpredictability of subordinate commanders who are separated from the main army. With limited intelligence, not only tactically, but also strategically, this game will attempt to take advantage of all of the computer's advantages which I discussed above. If it works, we will attempt a similar game on the Civil War.

Although our primary interests are in the realm of historical games, we have just begun to venture into the world of science fiction and fantasy games. We felt that *The Warp Factor* was a major deviation from other computer sci-fi games, and we hope to design a fantasy game within the next year that will be significantly different from current computer adventures. With our eventual goal being the release of 12 new products every year, we hope to create a product line that will interest all computer gamers.

- Joel Billings

Computers to Go

by Aaron Allston

It's not very conspicuous, this little shop, with windows facing a subterranean-dwelling joint to one side and a floozie across the street, all a stone's throw from the University of Texas at Austin campus. But Computers to Go may well represent an important development in the personal computer market.

The main order of business here is not selling computers, but selling computer time. For \$1/ten minutes, \$2.50/half-hour, or \$4.50/hour, anyone can walk in to play *Rescue at Risk!*, update his business records, or enter a dissertation and print it out on the shop's Diablo printer. The business also rents and leases computer systems and supplemental hardware for use outside the shop, and customers can rent-to-buy or lease-to-buy.

"The original philosophy," says Cincy Carter, founder/manager of Computers to Go, "was to buy those computers and rent 'em to people. Then the money caught on." He chose only one computer — an Apple II system — and gradually built up from there. "We opened May of last year."

"We started to add accessories — software, hardware. As time has gone on, more and more things have happened." The little shop with approximately polyhedral walls now has nine computers operating on the premises, plus the systems and accessories currently out on rental or lease contracts.

The construction is interrupted as a pair of college students enter to negotiate for the Diablo for a month. Carter, a man with a lazy grin and a Ph. D. in Science Education, quickly concludes terms for its rental.

The business is expanding. Within the first few weeks of April, a branch business will open in a small shopping mall just up the street, with a menagerie of several Ataris, which will probably rent out at \$2.50/hour. The main shop does not have a predominant system — Apples, Ataris, PMC-90s, and Interlic Data System Superbrains are pretty evenly ac-

tered about. The branch business will attempt to provide some competition to the area's pinball/electronic game arcade.

"As far as I know," Carter declares of Computers to Go, "it's the first anywhere. We've had people call in from out of state who've heard of us." And what are the chances of others starting up similar businesses?

"I don't think very many people would want to," he laughs. "First of all, ten years of experience is a nice sounding board. Then, there are the long days." The business is open 13 hours a day, 6 days a week, which he says is something of a heresy in the industry. The branch

business will have even later working hours.

A delivery man begins bringing in terminals for use with the University computer systems, piling box after box in a growing wall, blocking access to a line of computers. New purchases such as those, plus rising costs in hardware — such as an across-the-board rise in Apple products at the first of the year — and purchases for the new branch minimize the amount of advertising Carter can afford, but some promotions are apparent. Gateway "calendars" with each day of the month bearing a money-off coupon are stacked on a table. An upcoming promotion involves fribsies, which are probably not the sort of floppy disks most customers are used to.

Computers to Go is a novelty among the businesses which surround the UT campus. Perhaps the concept will catch on, but it will take time to see. In the meantime, the shop stands cheerily open, with walls cluttered with packages of sale-or-ent software, programming manuals, computer-art and T-shirts, the floor littered with a mound of boxed Atari software and occasional pieces of hardware, ready for the customer not yet willing to shell out thousands of dollars for a personal system.

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DEUS EX MACHINA



Computer Gaming Update

by Bruce Webster

It's been over a year and a half now since my first column on computers and gaming. During that time I have written nearly a dozen articles, played many of the top games on the market, had many discussions (either face-to-face or through letters), and generally done a lot of thinking on the subject. The field has changed a lot during that period as well. I think it would be fair to say that close to 90% of the computer game software now on the market (ignoring the "101 BASIC Games" genre) wasn't available back in mid-1979. A few companies have covered large chunks of the market, while new companies, based around one or two pieces of software, are springing up all the time. Much has changed in a year and a half, and the rate of change shows no signs of slackening off.

The purpose of this column is to stop and take a look at some areas in the field of computer gaming; where it is now, and where it might go in the future. At the same time, I'm going to throw in my own opinions about some of the games, companies, and trends in the market.

Recent Developments

The last few years has seen a veritable flood of gaming software for home computers. At the same time, the level of sophistication has increased dramatically. In the summer of 1979, most of the games I found at the local Computerland were fairly simple arcade-type games, and most of the computers being sold were cassette-based systems with 16K of RAM. Now most of the systems going out of that same store are 32 or 48K systems with at least one floppy disk drive, and most of the games hanging on their walls

have also gone up in size, complexity... and price. *Pleaser Zap* and *Space Maze* have given way to *Computer Baseball* and *Hellfire Warrior*, cassettes have been replaced by diskettes, and average prices have gone from around \$12 up to \$30, with many games falling in the \$40-\$60 bracket. In short, computer games are becoming big business, and some distinct categories have developed.

Perhaps the most popular class of computer game currently out on the market is the role-playing game. These include such titles as *Automated Simulations' Dungeons* and *Starquest* series, the various versions of *Adventure* (Microsoft, Scott Adams, et al), *EdoWare's Space/Space II*, and a host of others. I see two basic reasons for their popularity. First are the same reasons that *Traveler*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and other role-playing games are popular — and I will leave it to the reader to decide just what those reasons are (thus neatly avoiding having to perform that analysis). Second, they give the player an always-ready gamemaster who is available at any hour of the night or day so you can play for his sole benefit.

Curiously enough, two sub-classes have developed among these games. One is centered around the original *Adventure* game from MIT. This type usually is dialog-centered, and is based around picking up everything in sight in order to solve problems later or to help you get out of the twenty little passages that all look the same. Graphics and combat options are scarce. The other type is best exemplified by *Automated Simulations' Dungeons/Starquest* series. This type is combat-centered, and is based around killing (or naming, from) every living thing you run into, avoiding traps, and picking up what treasure you can along the way. Graphics are used heavily, and commands are quite limited and deal mostly with combat. All-conditions of each type tend to put down

the other. I personally enjoy both, and would like to see the two styles merged.

Video

Video games in arcades have become more sophisticated, and so have the arcade-type games for home computers. These tend to be imitations of the games available in the arcades — *Space Invaders* and the like — though Atari's *Star Raiders* is a wonderful exception. And mention of Atari brings up another point: the graphics capabilities of most home computers can't match those of arcade units (Atari is the exception again), so the games usually aren't quite as nice. However, if you're an arcade game fan (and I must confess to spending a few quarters now and then in the local mall), these home computer versions can quickly pay for themselves — especially if you charge your friends as well.

A number of simulation games have shown up on the market, though not as many as I would like. *EdoWare, Inc.* has produced the most innovative of those that I've seen, especially *Terraviva* (which could be called a role-playing game, except it's nothing like the ones mentioned above). Indeed, *EdoWare* has produced all that I've seen, with the exception of *Muse Software's Three Mile Island* (another excellent game). This is definitely an area that could use more development.

There are also a number of "computer" use the unexciting" games, not to mention the innumerable versions of *Star Trek* (all designed to avoid problems with Gene Roddenberry and each other). I have a personal weakness for these types of games (though I have yet to see a *Star Trek* game I like), and my all-time favorite computer game — *Turn Clavier's Galactic Empire* (not to be confused with Douglas Carson's *Galactic Empire*) — falls into this category (see my review in TSG 31).

Along the same line are the many play-by-mail games that are completely mediated by a gamemaster with the help of a computer. Most of these are based on a space exploration/conquest theme, e.g., *Universe II*, *Warp Point One*, and the grand-daddy of them all, *Starweb*. And not only are most of these computer-based, but now *Starweb* moves can be sent in via a nation-wide time-sharing network known as *The Source*, and rumors has it that *Empire's Challenge* will soon be doing the same.

Ironically, there are very few true "computer wargames." Strategic Simulations, Inc. has made the biggest and best effort in this area; unfortunately, their games tend to cost an arm and a leg. *Ass-*



Apple II

sensational
software

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Milestones

Disk CS-4018 \$19.95

Requires 48K Apple II or Apple II Plus

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Ion Hill has put out some games at the other end of the financial spectrum, but, as the saying goes, you get what you pay for — not much. The lack of development here could be explained by the observation that conventional wargames aren't as attractive to computers as SF/fantasy games. The problem is, I don't know if that's really true, and it doesn't explain why so few SF/fantasy wargames for computers have been developed. The "arcadgame" format has been well developed for board games — why not for computer games?

Areas for Exploration

While the variety of computer games has been steadily increasing, there are some areas that have not yet been developed, or at least not very well. In some cases this lack of development is understandable, but in others it is very curious.

I am most amazed by the lack of software for gamemasters of role-playing games. It is incredible that, given the growing national popularity of D&D and other such games, no one has come up with marketable software to (1) dump dungeons (countries, worlds, solar systems, etc.), (2) perform other random occasions and initializations that can take up so much of a gamemaster's time, and (3) actually aid the gamemaster while he/she is moderating a session (rolling dice, determining combat factors, generating random encounters). I mentioned this concept in my very first column, and I've been threatening to do an entire column on the subject ever since. Maybe I'd better follow through. Or perhaps I'll just write the software myself.

Along the same lines, I've seen little mention of programs that are designed to either aid players with a given boardgame or to provide a player with an opponent for said game. There has been occasional mention of game-aid programs in SFI publications, and Adrian Peit down in Australia has written and published a game-aid program for SIV's *After The Holocaust*, but that's all I've seen along those lines. As for opponent programs, the only mention I've run across has been in letters I've received from TSG readers, half of whom seem to be working on programs to play *Ogre*.

There is yet another wide-open field: multi-player games. There are a large number of possibilities here, several people sitting around one computer, two (or more) computers hooked directly up to each other; two (or more) computers communicating via modem; do-it-yourself play-by-phone or play-by-mail games;

and so on. *Galester Empires* is the best example of the first possibility that I know of, handling one to twenty players. None of the other ideas have been commercially developed, as far as I know. Why don't some of the numerous software entrepreneurs work on these types of games, rather than turning out the 37th version of *Adventure* or *Star Trek*?

The Future

The problems I see facing the growing software market in the future are largely the same as I see facing the entire personal computing software market. Game programs will continue to be expensive, due largely to over-anxious distributors and programmers who hope to make a quick killing before software pirates distribute their programs free of charge. Software piracy will continue to flourish, aided by new and better copying programs and fueled by rising software prices. If you seem to see a vicious spiral there, welcome to the club. My personal opinion is that we will see no solution to these problems until someone introduces the software equivalent of microgames, i.e., well-designed but inexpensive games. If that approach is combined with the use of components (counters, maps, etc.) that are not easily copied, we could see the same sort of revolution in computer gaming as occurred in boardgaming when *Ogre* hit the market.

The continuing sophistication of personal computers will have an impact on the games being written. As mentioned

above, the Atari 400/800 has far and away the best graphics of any personal computer I've seen and will set a new standard for the industry. As modems become more popular, local and national networks will provide new types of game playing experiences. More games will be written in languages other than Basic, especially now that Apple is licensing a specially modified UCSD Pascal operating system that allows Pascal programs to be booted up and run on 48K Basic systems. Inertia and a tight economy will probably delay any really significant hardware advances, but 1985 should probably see a large number of 16-bit (and maybe 32-bit) personal computers on the market, with increased processor speed and memory expandable to 1 MB (1000K) and up.

If I had to reduce my comments on the current state of computer gaming to one phrase, it would be *cheaper computer — "let the buyer beware."* There is a lot of half-finished software out on the market, needed among the better-written stuff, and both types are very expensive. Frankly, my advice to those of you who own your own computers and who want to play well-written games on them is to learn to program well and write most of them yourselves, buying only the ones that you really want to. If you don't feel you can program well, or if you don't have the time, then read the reviews, ask around, try to actually play the game before buying it — and be prepared to spend a lot of money.

Next: Play-by-phone update

TRS-80 Briefing

A regular reviewer, Jon Mielson, was asked a while ago to tell the editor about the newest models of TRS-80 available. We thought his answer was worth publishing.

In is the TRS models. There are now five major models of the TRS-80. Generally their software is not interchangeable.

Model I Level II is a 4K beginner's machine. Not many serious programs, and not much software available. Any of its programs cannot be used on any other TRS-80 without a lot of modifications.

Model I Level III has just been taken off the market (there is a company in California that is producing the PNC computer which uses the EXACT same ROM and RAM as the generic line will continue) although Radio Shack is going to continue to produce peripherals and software for this machine. It has sold well over 350,000 and is the single most popular computer EVER sold. Model I Level II refers to the Read Only Memory arrangement. This model

TRS-80 may have between 16 to 45K and all sorts of devices added on. It was taken off the market only because it was thought too expensive to modify it to comply with the new FCC regulations.

Model II is a fairly expensive business-oriented machine. Its software is not compatible with any other TRS-80 but there is little game software for it.

Model III is the "new Model I Level II." It has all the latest improvements and a couple of drawbacks. The vast majority of Model I Level II software will work on the Model III. Notably Radio Shack can't tell owners which will and which won't.

Color Model TRS-80 is the latest TRS and is almost solely designed to challenge APPLE as the game model. The Color TRS is completely incompatible with any other TRS-80. Personally I believe it will fail horribly.

Therefore, a reference to "TRS-80" on this page means the Model I Level II or Model III, unless otherwise specified.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

Akalabeth

by Lord British

Many games on the market have one of two major flaws. Some have minimal graphics. And those which have decent graphics often run so slo-o-o-o-w that the game values get lost in the lag time between moves. When I created Akalabeth (and now Ultima), these were the two main problems I had to address.

Before Akalabeth, fantasy computer graphics were fairly primitive. In fact, my inspiration for Akalabeth was a game called Escape, which had low resolution graphics. My objective was to create a game which would show monsters and dungeon corridors in perfect perspective.

I approached the problem from three angles: the artist's approach (thanks, Mom!), the calculus approach (thanks, Dad!) and the trigonometric approach (thanks, Mc!). Fortunately, all the paths led me to a very simple solution. The implementation can get a bit complicated, but an explanation in layman's language appears below.

Having cleared this hurdle, I started to design the "game." Fantasy role-playing games generally have elaborate combat systems, with lots of modifiers and look-up tables. A similar approach often crops up in computer games, but the result is so slow that a real-time game is all but impossible.

Though I am a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, with many a bloodless combat behind me, I thought a simpler approach was necessary. In Akalabeth, all the complexities of hand-to-hand combat are covered by a few, simple algorithms. Purists will not be happy that, for example, I use "sword" to represent everything from a mighty hand-and-a-half to a springy little spee. But simplifications were unavoidable, given the game speed I hoped to achieve.

Many games which do have nice graphics aren't worth playing because the programmer concentrated on the graphics and didn't allow enough variety. Wary of this pitfall, I stocked my dungeons with thieves who stole your weapons, gnomes who ate up your food, traps that dropped you to a lower level, and mazes which disguised themselves as chests. An adventurer's life may be short, but it is certain to be exciting.

Unfortunately, Akalabeth was not perfect (sigh!). Because I did not have a disk drive (everyone has to start at the bottom), I could not include a routine for saving the game. Even when I got a disk drive, there was no memory left to allow a game saving routine.

Having finished Akalabeth (and having learned much from my mistakes), I set out to design the most complete fantasy role-playing game yet written for the computer. All but a few of my most far-fetched goals were reached with Ultima. Ultima is Akalabeth and more. Players

have a choice of four races and four professions. Magic has been expanded. Technology has been introduced. A character can eventually buy a time machine or space shuttle, if he survives long enough.

Ultima is written in Basic and machine language. (Akalabeth was primarily Basic.) Basic makes string manipulation easy and is good enough for the text portions of the program. Machine code, of course, runs much faster than Basic and must be used for things like complete in-on screen updates. By skillfully mixing the languages, a programmer can combine his own convenience with the player's.

Throughout my efforts, I have emphasized realism, trying to give the player a character's-eye-view of my fantasy world. I use one-stroke orders to speed input. I have gone to great lengths to make the graphics as clean and realistic as possible. With this kind of help, it becomes very easy for gamers to make the transition from reality to fantasy.

3-D Graphics

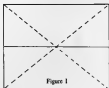


Figure 1

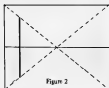


Figure 2

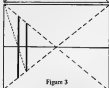


Figure 3

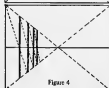


Figure 4

One way to draw a dungeon corridor is to use the same technique that an artist uses to draw a row of telephone poles beside a country road. First, use diagonal lines to connect the corners of your screen and draw the horizon through the center (Figure 1).

Place the first pole as shown in Figure 2. I find this looks best at a place a third or a fourth of the distance from the edge to the center.

Next, draw a line from the upper left hand corner of the screen, and through

the point where the first telephone pole intersects the horizon. The base of the second pole belongs where the line touches the lower diagonal, as in Figure 3. To establish the base of the third pole, draw a line from the top of the first pole, through the point where the second pole intersects the horizon. You can continue this process as often as necessary, placing the fourth pole, the fifth, and so on (Figure 4).

For further information, feel free to contact me care of this magazine.

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THE Beep-Boop Menace

Dear Sir: I have what is probably a fairly common problem. I am addicted to an arcade video game called *Bertrone*.

It all began innocently when some friends convinced me to 'try it.' I was mildly entertained and afterward thought nothing of it. Weeks later, a lonely evening found me in the arcade's neighborhood and I went in to pass the time. Before I knew what order I had begun, I was destroying enemy tanks, missiles and saucers with such accuracy that I made the day's top 10 scores and got to put my initials on the screen.

Since then, I have spent hundreds of quarters maintaining my habit, and my only goal for the day is to improve my personal best and stay atop the standings.

I have started lying about what I do with my time, and I must wear gloves to hide the tell-tale blisters on my hands.

I think people should know that *Bertrone*, because it is three-dimensional, is much more dangerous than the "recreational" games like *Atari Command*, *Star Cabal*, or *Space Invaders*.

Today in my car I had a flashback. To avoid later flak, I revved through oncoming traffic and maneuvered to blast them off the road. It was only when my trigger thumb pecked and nothing happened that I snapped out of it and found myself backed up on a grassy knoll. I swore then and there never to play again. But I've tried to stop before and I always go back. What am I to do?

— 542,000 and Counting

Dear Sir or Madam:

I don't know what any of us is going to do. You are one of the countless American citizens who have fallen prey to the greatest threat ever to confront this nation.

For the first time in our history, this country's corporate establishment is working hand-in-hand with the International Communist Conspiracy. Their goal is nothing less than complete control of the minds of this generation of American youth. And they are winning.

Where are you now when we need you, Ron Parr? Probably playing *Space Invaders*.

The conspirators had a run at us a couple of decades ago with pinball machines. They were within a hair of gaining the ultimate triumph when a ball-bearing shortage in Russia pulled us back from the brink.

I personally witnessed how close they

came. I had a roommate at that time. I would say to him, "Roommate, tonight we have our choice of going to the Playgirls of the Southwest Conference Naked Mayonnaise Wrestling finals, watching the Texas Longhorns play a team of fire-breathing, winged pageboys from the bowels of hell for the future of the universe, or talking with representatives of the two major political parties, both of which wish to run us for president. What do you think?"

"Let's go play some pinball," he would say.

Today, it is worse. I have a friend, a professional man of impeccable credentials and of high standing in the community. He tells his wife that he will be late coming home because he has a meeting with organized-crime cronies, a heroin-shooting party and then the construction of a flaming affair with his secretary.

"I could handle that," his wife says, "but I know that he is really sweating out to play *Space Invaders*."

Oh yes, I have seen them. I have seen them in the convenience stores and the

theater lobbies and the arcades, their cheeks hollow, their frames gaunt, their eyes glazed and listless, lining up to play that lost quarter into *Asteroids*.

We have produced a generation that cannot read. Soon, I fear, we will have one which cannot speak; a whole generation of Americans who, when they open their mouths, will come forth only with "beep boop ding dang boop boop beep."

I'll tell you, "542,000 and Counting." I can see only one way out of it. Retaliate in kind. Retaliate with force to swift and devastating as to destroy their minds before they can do it to ours. Yes, you know what I am talking about.

I am talking here about dropping video cassettes, produced by NBC and ABC respectively, of *Real Russians* and *That's the Incredible Ukraine* across the length and breadth of you know where.

I know it's absurd. I know that it's despicable, barbaric torture. But it's us against them and perious times demand stern measures.

To the battlements, I say. Or, in your language, beep ding dang boop boop beep!

— Mike Kelly

Kelly is a columnist for The Austin American-Statesman. Reprinted by permission.

TTL 2448

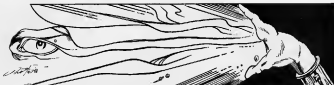
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This was another popular contest, we got better than fifty entries, many of them very good. Therefore, we've printed as many as space allowed. Entries have been subjected to a minimum of editing, and have been left in the original system(s) for which they were written. GMs or characters wishing to modify spells to other systems should have little difficulty.

The winner was Draper Kauffman, of St. Louis. He sent three items, all ingenious and useful.

The Spell Crystal: Magic item. A periscope lens of pure rock crystal, usually worn on a headband, helm, or pendant. It can store the memory of any one creature spell and repeat that spell at the wearer's command. Power for its spells must come from the wearer (or a ST Battery) at the normal cost. The Spell Crystal can be used in either of two ways. A) to double a spell as the wearer casts it, creating two gargoyles instead of one, for example, or B) to repeat a spell which the wearer has just cast; thus, having just summoned a gargoyle (or two, as in A), the wearer could use the Crystal to continue summoning one gargoyle per turn until he got bored or ran out of ST. The wearer may fight, move, cast other spells, etc., while the crystal repeats its spell, but once the repetition is stopped, the wearer cannot recast it without successfully casting a new spell. In TPT, the Spell Crystal is a greater magic item which takes 5 weeks to prepare and costs \$12,500. The enchantment requires a suitable crystal (\$500), 150 ST per day, and supplies worth \$1559 per week: one dose of Telepathy poison (\$1500), one piece of the tongue (\$35), and 24 of common ingredients.

Summon Small Creature: Creation spell. Rings small non-magical creature the wizard specifies to do the wizard's bidding. Neither ST or IQ can be more than 6. Useful creatures include cats, dogs, monkeys, slinkies, ferrets, skunks, otters, hawks, bats, dragonsets, snakes, scorpions, and so on. Might be: IQ 6, 1 ST to cast and 1 ST/turn to maintain. Note: If the wizard barely succeeds (i.e., makes the maximum possible successful

Magic Contest Results

roll), the GM may substitute any creature which is similar in some way to the one specified.

Rod of Aaron: Throw spell. Might be around IQ 13 in TPT. Costs 3 ST to cast, 1 per minute to maintain. Makes flap things stiff while spell is on. Can be used to turn a vine into an inextensible pole or hook, to turn a rope ladder into a rigid one, to make a rowboat out of an appropriately shaped piece of oldcloth, and so on. Object should be laid out in the desired shape first, a single spell can affect only volumes of 2.5 cubic meters or less. The spell can be used on living things — it is much prized by courtesans, for example — but the cost to maintain it is 1 ST per now if the target is existing being stiffened. (A magic item based on this spell would cost about \$6,500, should be wand-shaped, and must be touched to the item to be stiffened; the effect lasts as long in contact is maintained, at no ST cost.)

Second place goes to Theodore Miller (Howard Beach, NY) for a remarkably smart gadget.

Rings of Dorian Gray: When each is worn by a living humanoid any physical change that would normally affect one wearer happens to the other wearer instead. This includes injury, disease, the effects of aging, magically-induced changes (polymorph, charisma, invulnerability, etc.), energy drain, fatigue and rest, hunger and eating, normal or magical healing, and so on.

If one wearer dies the effect stops until someone else wears that ring, and all injury above that necessary to kill this wearer happens to the one being attacked. The rings may only be removed by Remove Curse, Wash, or the death of the wearer.

Player characters may discover either a single ring or a pair. Those finding only one ring from a pair, when the other is

worn by a nonplayer character somewhere else, are likely to end up in unusual situations. For example, they may arrive in the midst of plenty, once when they eat the other wearer feels full and doesn't eat, causing the player character to starve. A player character with one ring may waste through meals without being harmed, but only until the other wearer dies, or ends it by attempting suicide, which will kill the player character instead.

A player character who discovers or produces a pair of rings may avoid the effects of aging by giving the other to a young character, buy a slave to take messages for him, and so on. A reverse scenario is always possible, however, so that the player had better either make a good deal or hire some tasteworthy guards to watch the other wearer.

And there were any number of excellent runners-up:

Place Emblems (alteration, MU spell)

Level: 6

Range: 6" +1"/level

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: 2 creatures

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 3 segments

Saving Throw: Special

Explanation/Description: By means of this spell, the mage-user can either change places with another creature or have two other creatures change places with each other. In order to effect this change, both creatures must be within the range of the spell and must have missed their saving throw (willing creatures need not make a saving throw). Creatures of animal or lower intelligence are not allowed a saving throw. This spell could affect undead, but those of more power than a skeleton or zombie get a saving throw at +2. The larger creature must have no more than 3 times the mass of the smaller one.

This spell could be used as a means of escape or as a combat spell. If a mage-user was in combat outside with an opponent, for example, he could have it change places with an eagle that is passing overhead. (In Wizard this spell would be

about 1Q, 16 and cost 2 strength points per magnitude between the two parties.)

— George F. Harlowe III

Soal Clove

Statistics: (For AD&D and Avdon Game) Level: 8

Range: Touch

Duration: Permanent

Area of Effect: Special

Casting Time: 2 hours

Saving Throw: Special

Mass Cost: 20

Explanation/Description: This spell creates an identical copy of the subject's mind and places it in a vessel where it will be at the command of the caster. The subject must either be willing or unconscious during the entire ceremony. The vessel into which the copy will be placed must have a value of at least 200 Gold Pieces per level of the subject. If the subject is willing, no saving throw is made, however, if he is unwilling and unconscious, a saving throw is made. If the throw is within 2 of the required number, the copy is made and implanted in the vessel, but the caster has no control over it. If the throw is 3 or more above the necessary roll, the spell has no effect and the subject becomes conscious; 3 or more below, and it is successful. Once it is in the vessel, it is under the control of the caster. It must answer any questions put to it by the caster (it can speak), but it can say anything it wants to at any time. The copy does not retain any spell ability unless it is subject to above saving throw situation, in which case it has the full spell ability of the original subject and is not under the control of the caster.

— Carl M. Brashear

Gregyre (Incantation, MU spell)

Level: 1

Range: 6' +1"/level

Duration: Special

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 3 segments

Saving Throw: none

Explanation/Description: This spell shoots flaming liquid on one or more creatures in a 10 ft. or more area. The liquid burns longer than oil and cannot be put out by normal means. It can be stored in special enchanted jars for a number of days equal to the level of the spell caster. The damage, if on one creature, is 2-12 the first round, 1-6 the second round, and 1-4 each successive round. The duration is three rounds plus 1 round for every level above 5 (i.e. a 7th level MAU would have 5 rounds of damage: 2-12, 1-6, 1-4, 1-4, 1-4). The flame can also be sprayed over the whole 10 ft. area, doing 1-3, 1-2, 1

and 1 more for each successive round of burning (i.e. 7th level, 4 trolls, each takes 1-3, 1-2, 1 and 1 roll separately for each). When sprayed, each creature over 5 per flank loses burning time by 1 round (i.e. 4 trolls burn normally, but 6 trolls -1 round, etc.). For every 5 levels, the caster can use 1 oil flask and do 10 sq. ft. area (e.g. a 15 level caster can use three flasks and do 30 ft. area, 15 creatures). Material components for this spell are one or more flasks of oil, and a pinch of sulfur added into each flask.

— Mark Oster

Mapping Portion. Endows user with the ability to sense his location accurately, including his direction and distance from any known reference point, and to remember accurately any path actually taken by the user. Lasts 1 day. In TTY, requires the brass of 20 housing pipes (53 each), and five weeks to make. Costs \$300.

Ray of Direction. When the wearer concentrates on a place which is personally known to him, the Ray will surge if the finger it is on is pointed in the direction of that place, the strength of the sensation is inversely proportional to the distance. In addition, the wearer may use that finger to trace (on a map, etc.) an

accurate rendering of any path he has taken within the past 48 hours while wearing the ring. May also be set as a headband or helm and worn on the forehead, in which case it tingles when the wearer looks in the right direction and allows him to retrace a path with his eyes while walking or looking at a map. Worn this way, it is a lesser magic item, costs \$3000, and takes 3 weeks to make, starting with a gold ring or nugget worth \$70 and using 120 ST per day and one dose of Mapping Portion (\$300) per week.

(Obviously, there could also be a Location Spell — perhaps 1Q 11, costing 1 ST per 5 minutes, or something like that.)

— Susan Kaufman

Smoke (C)/IQ-12: Fills one hex with thick, yellow, rolling clouds of noxious smoke, extending some 3 meters into the air. A hex may be smoked while a figure is in it. Figures may move freely through or into smoked hexes. A figure attacking from or through a smoke hex does so at a -2DX; any attack into a smoke hex is at a -2DX. Any figure who moves into a smoke hex and stops (no attack, disbelieve, etc.) takes 1 hit of Fatigue damage due to smoke inhalation. Any figure present in a hex when it is first smoked must make a 4-die roll vs. DX. Success means

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the figure hold his breath and jumped away into an adjacent hex, failure means the figure takes 1 hit of Fatigue damage. Cost for this spell: 2 ST. Note: This spell would probably also be available in 4- and 7-hex forms. I recommend that the 4-hex version be an IQ-14, 4 ST Cost spell and that the 7-hex version be an IQ-16, 6 ST Cost spell.

Zone of Silence (C)/IQ-14. This spell creates a magical barrier to sound. A Zone of Silence will prevent all sound of any type or strength from passing through it, as well as any sound originating in the affected area. It will NOT stop light, instantaneous beams, or in fact anything physical, just sound. Basic ST cost is 3 to cover an area within 1 hex of the wizard; range can be increased by 1 hex in all directions for each additional ST point the wizard puts into it. Duration of this spell is 3 turns, but this too may be increased (no matter what its range) at a cost of 1 ST per turn. Example: A wizard wishes to cast a Zone of Silence over an area 3 hexes from his own hex for 4 turns. It costs him 5 ST to cast it, plus 2 ST for extending it an additional 2 hexes, plus 1 more ST to hold it an extra turn, for a total ST cost of 6 ST. If the wizard is killed or goes unconscious, the Zone will lift. The Zone CAN be adjusted to affect a part of an area, if the wizard so desires.

If a Zone of Silence only partially restricts the "flow of sound" (that is, if sound can still find some path around the Zone), subtract 1 MH from the distance the sound carries for each hex covered by the Zone.

Force Field (C)/IQ-25: This spell will create a magical barrier that will stop almost anything — spells, physical attacks, illusions, images, summoned beings, etc. It does not affect spells already cast, and will not prevent Demons, astral bodies, or interdimensional figures from crossing it. When a spell is cast on a figure protected by a Force Field, the wizard casting the spell loses the full ST cost for that spell, because it succeeded but was nullified. Physical attacks against a figure protected by a Force Field are conducted normally, except that no harm is done to the protected figure (no matter what the die roll is). Cost: 20 ST to cast, plus 5 ST per turn it is maintained. Range is 1 hex from the wizard's hex, this may be extended at a cost of 5 ST per hex (not per extra hex of range). This spell may NOT be removed by a Dispel or Enhancement, although of course a Wish will remove it. The catch: (1) It takes 5 undisturbed turns to construct a Force Field, any disturbance of the wizard constructing it costs the wizard 1 ST and forces him to

start over. (2) When the first attack is made against the Force Field, the wizard who constructed it must make a 5-die saving roll on IQ; failure means the Force Field is faulty and offers NO protection. — Steve Woodcock

Bats Out of Hell (C)/IQ-15. TFT: Rings 146 x 100 common bats out of a fiery hole which briefly appears in the floor (or ground). These are not vampire bats and will not attack. Their main usefulness is to provide a diversion or cover a retreat. A dense cloud of several hundred bats emerging from a flaming pit could make it difficult for your opponents to see you. This spell is also useful in impressing peasants. Cost: 3 ST. Bats remain for 3 turns at no additional cost. AD&D: (conjuration/summoning, MU spell)

Level: 4

Range: 3"

Duration: 2 rounds + 1 round/level

Area of Effect: Special

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 3 segments

Saving Throw: none

Explanation/Description: Upon casting this spell the magico-user causes a swirling cloud of 100-600 bats to erupt from a glowing hole in the floor. The bats will occupy a 1" square area and completely block out vision through this area for 1 round per 100 bats. The material components are a vial of bat's blood and a small amount of sulfur.

— Michael J. Vander Bunt

Mobius Ladder: A ladder runs through the center of an open shaft in the center of a room in a dungeon. The shaft extends for three levels, though it seems endless. When someone climbs through the ceiling of the top level he enters the floor of the bottom level on the opposite side of the ladder and vice versa.

— James H. Kelley

Death Disc: This spell generates one or more magical metal discs three feet in diameter, with razor sharp edges. The disc floats 30" feet above the ground and travels at about 40mph in a straight line in whatever direction the wizard wishes. It can usually cut an unarmed person in half.

At a higher level spell the discs can be "pre-programmed" to hover in a still position until triggered by something such as body heat or movement. A set of discs set up this way at one end of a long narrow room makes an effective trap.

The discs are very strong, stronger than any natural metal, and very thin; almost invisible if viewed edge-on.

The discs move so fast that they are very hard to dodge, but since they move at a fixed height they'll miss someone who has ducked, or a very short hobbit. Also, a strong fighter with a good shield should be able to block or deflect a disc.

The disc dissolves after it hits a target, or its straight line motion is broken. Maximum range depends on level (D&D) or ST used (TFT).

— Ann Delaney

Contest

Rarely do two sides battle with identical units. A force's machines may be comparable to its foe's (i.e., Tigers and T-34s) — but not identical. So far, for *Ogre/GEV*, we've seen the Combine's cyber-tanks — the *Ogres* — and the Paucoprecipitate light units. No pictures have been published for the Combine's tanks, *GEVs*, etc. . . . and all we know about the Paucoprecipitate "Fencer" cyber-tank is its name and the specs from *GEV*.

So this month's contest is for the artists. Draw one or all of the "anything" units. Any size and style is acceptable: color, B&W, blueprint . . . whatever you like. The artist of the best rendition of each unit will receive a 6-figure TSG sub. That makes six possible winners: Fencer, HVY Tank, LT Tank, MSL Tank, Howitzer, and MHMZ. The *GEV* is excluded from the list; we already have a great design for the Combine's *GEV*, and you'll see it soon.

Any design that's good enough to win

will also be used in preparing the artwork for the new editions of *Ogre* and *GEV*. In other words, the final designs will be based on the contest winners. Winners will be chosen on the basis of convincing design first, and artistic merit second.

All entries become the property of TSG. We reserve the right to award fewer prizes if no entries of publishable quality are received in some categories. Entries must be postmarked no later than May 31, 1981.

CORRECTION

Last month's contest contained two typographical errors which affect winners. The entry infinity units based on 1813 and 1914 should be on 9813 and 9914, respectively.

If anyone manages a win with the positions marked (or figures out the proper positions and the right answer) we'll award the prizes as promised. HOWEVER — we will ALSO award prizes to the first three right answers that mention this correction. Other rules are as explained in TSG 38. Sorry about the error, death to proofread!

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Featured Review:

The Morrow Project



by William A. Barton

Barnor has it that a group of Michigan wargamers was busily working away, designing a science fiction role-playing game set in a post-holocaust world in which players were forced to struggle to survive against a hostile environment, latent radioactivity and savage mutants, when they heard of TSR's impending release of *Genesee World* — a SF role-playing game set in a post-holocaust world in which players were forced to struggle to survive against a hostile environment, latent radioactivity and savage mutants . . .

Bowing to TSR's professional status, the Michigan gamers, admittedly amateur, shelved their project. Then they beheld *Genesee World*, with its improbable futuristic weapons (liberally mixed with primitive spears and swords), strange silencers and mutated human and animal that seemed more refugees from the *AD&D Monster Manual* than evolutionary development. So, they took up their pens again. Their long, uncorrupted labor at last produced **THE MORROW PROJECT** — what may prove to be the most creditable post-holocaust RPG to date.

Now before anyone out there goes something about *Genesee World* clones, let me assure you that, beyond the basic pellets and a few unavoidable similarities (radiation zones, varied cities, mutants, etc.), I've found the two games to be quite different. Whereas *GW* can only be classed as a science fantasy game, **THE MORROW PROJECT** appears to be truly a science fiction RPG. With a few minor lapses, **TM** is firmly based on reasonable scientific extrapolation within its given premises. There are no "black rays" or "protein disruptors," no genetically altered DNA-freaks, no impossible killer warbots — mostly good of hard-core

SF with near-future technology.

Realism is central to **THE MORROW PROJECT**. Its designers have labored to avoid stretching anyone's suspension of belief, hence the inclusion only of existing weapons systems and those not too far beyond present capabilities, the listing of most mutants to evolutionarily feasible survival-oriented changes and the presentation of a believable — if not completely desirable — picture of post-holocaust America.

The game itself begins with WWII, 1989 — or at least the GM's part does. It is his responsibility to map out the various impact sites of the Russian missiles that destroyed the U. S. prior to the actual start of play. **TM** is quite detailed on this aspect of the game. More than five full pages are devoted to the war and the various cities and installations, broken down state by state, serving as ground zero for Soviet ICBMs, from MIRVs to biological warheads. Cities are devoted to performance capabilities of each type of missile located at Uncle Sam, how much punch the warheads have, how to calculate blast, fire and radiation zones — even whether mutants are land- or sub-based. And if the preprogrammed blueprint for destruction isn't enough for some GM's tastes, the game provides 150 random mutants for the GM to lob wherever his bloodthirsty heart pleases. Remember that little town with the speed trap where they nailed you for \$30? Hit it with an SS-N-8! The city where the ex-golfhead you dumped you love? Smack an SS-18Mib bowhead on it! (Be the first on your block to be the last on your block!)

Some may wish to deplore with much of the wholesale devastation involved in

this portion of the game, getting on with the business of play. It will be necessary, though, for the GM to at least map out impact sites in the general area where his particular team of players will be operating.

The war over, play may begin. You see, player-characters are all members of the Morrow Project, a group of civilian volunteers cryogenically frozen in hidden bases across the country. Their mission? To emerge from their hibernation following the holocaust, locate hidden supply caches and rendezvous at Prime Base so the group can begin the long process of rebuilding civilization. The problem is that Prime Base has been knocked out by another group of survivors, delaying the wake-up signal 150 years. The volunteers wake to a vastly changed — and quite hostile — world. Each team knows only the location of its own supply caches and must survive long enough to locate the remains of Prime Base. Therein lies the meat of the game, survival.

Morrow Teams seem well-equipped to do just that. Looking at the impressive array of equipment available, one may not think their task so difficult. Teams may find themselves with any of some 34 different firearms ranging from pistols, rifles, submachine guns and shotguns to grenade launchers, mortars, flamethrowers and lasers. The weapons a player gets are apparently determined by the referee (the rules are a bit hazy on this point), who also chooses the type of team the players are to portray — either recon, scientific, MARS (Mobile Assault, Rescue and Strike) or specialty teams — and may be forced to assign individual jobs in case the players' choices fail to make a balanced team. Jobs may range from driver to doctor to KP.

Simulation points will love the sections on weaponry. Instead of blasters, black ray guns or energy maces, as appear in *Genesee World*, **THE MORROW PROJECT** features Stinger carbines, Um submachine guns, M-16s and Atkinson assault shotguns. Nearly half of the two-page bibliography at the back of the rulebook lists military manuals as reference works, reflecting once again the designer's penchant for realism.

Morrow Project vehicles are well-conceived, too. These range from the lightly armed and armored ambulance, hovercraft and jeeps to the medium-armored commando vehicles and up to the special heavy vehicles, the Scientific-One mobile laboratory and the MARS-One military vehicle (a separate set of blueprints of the latter is available for anyone so inclined). The MARS-One, I might add, is easily recognizable as the Land Master

from the movie *Destination Alley*. So that the awesome fire power of the MARS-ONE (20mm cannons, flame guns, rockets, machineguns, missiles and mounted Claymores) doesn't unbalance the game, however, only four exist — and one of these is at Prime Base, the location of which is unknown to the player. Thus the chance of a team beginning the game with one is slim — unless the GM designs a lot of carriage early on.

Morrow teams are certainly well-equipped. But what of the characters manning the hardware? Character generation in *THE MORROW PROJECT* is relatively routine, the only major difference from other systems being that characteristics are determined by a 4D6-4 roll, resulting in the unusual range of 0 (1) to 20 in each of seven attributes: strength, constitution, dexterity, accuracy, charisma, psi and luck. Strength and constitution determine, among other things, how much damage of various sorts the character can take. Dexterity is a measure of how many actions he can take during a round. Accuracy is the determinant of how well he can hit with a weapon. (There are no skills to learn as in, say, *Traveller* or *Space Opera*.) Charisma is no different than in other RPGs; psi measures psychic potential, and luck is the factor used for saving throws, lucky shots and anything else the GM doesn't want to make an arbitrary decision on. TMP is unusual in that it makes no provision for IQ, the sideline perhaps being that Morrow volunteers by nature possess high intelligence. Secondary characteristics include blood and structure points, which are calculated from strength and constitution. The loss of too many of either of these could spell doom for a character. Percentages of Bps and Sps must be calculated per body part, too, and even blood type must be rolled up in case a transfusion becomes necessary.

Few guidelines are given the GM on getting the characters into play. I suppose the authors assumed most players and GMs would be experienced enough not to need any. Less than a page is devoted to this aspect of the game. Unless the referee is a total novice, however, he shouldn't have much trouble. Players should have no trouble at all. All the rules are well-written, clear and easy to follow. The most complicated part of the game is probably the combat system, and if followed carefully, even this should prove self-explanatory. A character need only roll one less than his accuracy factor on 1D20, taking in account variables such as range, visibility, target size, weapon used or automatic fire. Penetration is then determined by calculating a weapon's pen-

etration rating and cross-referencing it with the target's armor class. Determining damage is perhaps the most realistic — and therefore most complex — part of the whole system, including hit locations, death percentages, shock, blood loss, burn damage, poisons and an admirable system for determining cumulative radiation damage. One player in a Morrow tournament at an area con, his character lying bleeding in a blast crater, was heard to exclaim incredulously, "Hey, this is real!"

The post-war world of TMP is nearly as well-designed as its combat system. Rules for weather, technology, ruins, NPC reactions and the types of encounters Morrow teams may experience enrich the background settings. Specific encounters are governed by geographical location and may encompass sessions with groups including bikers, gypsy truckers, new American Indians, the "frozes chosen," left-over American commandos and displaced Soviet survivors, regular animal encounters, or mutants.

Though some of TMP's encounter groups do look a bit of *Gamma World's* cryptic alliances, the designers have avoided the too-easy temptation to go overboard. The few minor excesses that managed to creep in (as when a character gets

hit on the head by Bigfoot) can easily be dismissed in the spirit of fun.

THE MORROW PROJECT does have its problems. The section on poisons is too sketchy as to be almost worthless. However, few characters will do much with poisons anyway. Several encounters occur in connection with the fauna encounter table. Of several animals listed, from alligators to poisonous insects, only the mammals and the rare or mutated species are described in game terms at all. And while *THE MORROW PROJECT* is not the topographical monstrosity that *Space Opera* proved to be, more than a few errors can be found on its pages.

Still, overall, I'd have to give *THE MORROW PROJECT* the highest of ratings as a SF role-playing system. If it isn't at least nominated for the Origins awards this year, there just ain't no justice in general.

THE MORROW PROJECT is designed by Kevin Dockery, Robert Sadler and Richard Tacholka and is published by *Timelore, Inc.*, 31316 Carnody Dr., Warren, Michigan 48092. The rulebook sells for \$12; *Gamemaster's Shield*, \$5; *Gamemaster's packages of vehicular and personnel basic loads* are \$7 and \$9 respectively; *blueprints of the MARS vehicle* are \$6.

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Rumor Reliability in Traveller



by Steve Winter

One of the most valuable commodities for player-characters in *Traveller* is information. A false rumor can launch a bogy chase halfway across known space, costing thousands of credits and maybe a few lives.

The problem facing the referee is: what kind of rumors and stories has a character heard during his "pilot service"? After all, characters spend a considerable amount of time traveling the galaxy before actual play begins, and that time should be taken into account somehow. Secondly, referees need some consistent way of handling informants.

A simple table (see below) can solve this problem. A 2d throw, modified by the character's age and experience (referee's discretion) determines what he has heard about a subject. Informants are treated exactly like player characters, although some results on the table have different meanings for informants than they have for player-characters.

Rumor Table
(player-characters/informants)

2	inaccurate, believed
3	inaccurate, repeated
4	inaccurate, rumors
5	no information/inaccurate, rumors
6	partial
7	no information/partial
8	partial
9	no information/partial
10	accurate, rumors
11	accurate, rumors
12	accurate, repeated/second hand
13+	accurate, believed/first hand

The results should be interpreted as follows.

inaccurate, believed: The character has heard the same story several times

from reliable sources, and he believes it. The story is either misleading or totally false.

inaccurate, repeated: The character has heard the same or similar stories repeated by several sources which may or may not have been reliable. The character doesn't necessarily believe the stories, but they do carry the weight of repetition. They are misleading or totally false.

inaccurate, rumors: The character has heard of the subject once before, but he has no idea whether the story he heard was true or not. It wasn't. **no information/inaccurate, rumors:** A player character has never before heard of the object, person or phenomenon being investigated. Treat as inaccurate, rumors, for an informant. **partial:** This character knows a little, but not much, about the subject. His information may or may not be helpful. There is always a 1/6 chance that it is false.

no information/partial: Player characters have no information, informants have partial information.

accurate, rumors: Same as inaccurate, rumors, except the story was partially or completely true.

accurate, repeated/second hand: For player characters, same as inaccurate, repeated, except the information is true. Informants may claim to have known or spoken with someone who had firsthand knowledge of, or saw computer files on, or otherwise came into direct contact with the subject under investigation.

accurate, believed/firsthand: Same as inaccurate, believed, except the stories were partially or completely true. If this is an informant, he has firsthand experience with the subject.

The referee should not disclose the actual result of the die roll, but determine the result secretly and present information to the players as they would have heard it. These stories can be as colorful or as bland as the referee cares (or is able) to make them, but it's a good idea to plan a few ahead so the players won't get suspicious. If the stories aren't plausible, you won't fool anybody.

In addition, informants should always get a reaction roll. A source with accurate information could refuse to talk to the players. Even worse, a source with misinformation could be extremely helpful, supplying maps, codes, or charts which are all wrong.

Informants who are extremely hostile or who have refused a bribe may also be characters. Consult the following table:

Die modifiers:	
bribe offer rejected	+1
reaction roll = 5	+1
4	+2
3	+3

source automatically lies on 2d roll of 13+

Since any single informant can be quite unreliable or unhelpful, it is a good idea to let players roll more often for informant encounters than for patrons. Two or three rolls per week, with appropriate DMs for Streetwise, Carousing, Liaison and Administrative Experience, is usually sufficient. The Patron Table works very well for determining the general character of informants.

Although this system was designed for *Traveller*, there's no reason why it could not be used in other role-playing systems like D&D or TFI. The table remains the same, only the modifiers need to be changed.

Simple Traps



by Lewis
Pulsipher

An experienced role-playing referee can draw on a repertoire of dozens of traps he's devised or experienced over the years, but a novice may find it hard to think of simple, effective traps which don't immediately kill — deathtraps aren't much fun. For the new referee's benefit, here are a few traps one step above the spikes-in-pit variety.

1. An alcove is built above a door in a room or corridor. Guards wait in the alcove, possibly using a listening hole to

the outside (funnel shaped at one end so that sound travels mostly one way). When a party of adventurers enters the area there's a good chance they won't notice the alcove until it's too late to stop the enemy from jumping into the party to attack the vulnerable spell-casters.

2. A ledge extends along one wall over a chasm or pit. When the adventurers are strung out along the wall, secret doors open and enemies with long poles come out, pushing off those nearest and using the poles to lever other adventurers over the edge.

3. At the end of a room lies an altar, statue, jewel, or some other object of interest. When it is touched it activates the opening mechanism for doors into the entrance to the room, and from these issue monsters. Until then, these doors cannot be forced open from the main room.

4. When a given object is touched, a pit opens. The victim falls in and the pit cover shuts. A wall inside the pit pivots and a doppleganger or other irritative shape-changer is rotated into the pit, where it assumes the role of the victim.

When the party gets the cover open they'll find their trapped comrade (they think) and a (false) door. It will look like the pit was designed to be a jail cell. The doppleganger can hide its time and then strike.

5. A large airtight room is occupied by a gelatinous cube or other fearsome creature, which will usually be burned by the adventurers. Perhaps the party will feel safer about staying if the creature is in a pit or other area it cannot rapidly move out of. As the burning progresses, lack of oxygen or, more likely, a high concentration of carbon monoxide may overcome adventurers. Heat or pressure change might activate a door seal, as well.

6. In a deserted dungeon area, stairs lead downward from one door then back up to another door some 50 feet from the first and at the same level. Torches burn at intervals on the walls. Anyone descending may be overcome by carbon dioxide or monoxide fumes, produced by the torches, which accumulate at the lowest part of the area.

7. A series of small rooms with one-way doors leads to a treasure. The only way out is through more rooms occupied by gelatinous cubes or other creepy-crawlers. The adventurers will run out of oil (for burning the monsters) before they reach safety.

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ICE WAR:

Playing the ESA

by Lawrence Person

Tired of playing the ESA player in Ice War and getting detected before you get to the first line of outposts? Do you get plastered with missiles and arrive at the outfields with only a fraction of your force? Feel like giving it all up and going home to Moscow and becoming a dentist like your mother told you to do? Then cry no more.

The ESA actually has the advantage. This may be hard to believe for those who have felt despair at the US side's numerous detection devices, missile satellites, and cheap troops via reinforcements. The important thing to remember is to use the advantage of your invisibility to the fullest. A few strategies that have worked for me are:

Old Faithful

This is my standard attack. It is usually effective against the standard (1 missile satellite, 3 outposts) American setup. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport, 2 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft, 4 light hovercraft.

Opening Move: This depends on the initial American setup. The US player will usually set up his outposts on hexes 1316, 1313, and 1611. This makes it necessary to send out your two armored sleds to destroy one outpost. The remainder of your force should be placed in one of the back row hexes. Fly back, such as 0603 or 0602. Unless your opponent is a recon satellite freak, your chances of not being

detected the first turn are good. It's downhill from there.

Shooting the Gap: The chances are good that at least one of your armored sleds will make it to an outpost and destroy it. Sometimes it gets tough when the US player uses recon sleds and hovercraft to close the gap. In a situation like that, and most of the time otherwise, the best move is to use your remaining sleds to knock out another outpost before taking on combat units. This gives your main force a wider "gap" to shoot through. If you have a situation where you have to deal with sleds and hovercraft as well as recon satellites, you have a chance to pass the outposts undetected only if two or more of them have already been destroyed.

The Attack: If you shoot the gap successfully, you should then have a sizable force at the feet of a group of poorly defended outfields. If you were detected, you should still have a sizable force almost on top of your objectives.

If you are undetected it would be best to split your forces up. Try to get your armored units to hexes 2423, 2323, 2324, and 2222. Thus, combat by-product conversion would become the US player's worst enemy. To keep you from destroying his outfields he has to risk destroying them himself.

If your forces are detected early, or the US player prefers a large initial force to reinforcements, it becomes necessary to get down to the main battle. The first obstacle should be infantry units on Midway and Cross tides. But if your opponent was stupid enough to put tanks there, just bypass them and go on to the outfield.

If you face infantry units on the islands, it may be wise to sacrifice your sled transport in an attack on the units at Cross and put the rest at 2021, 2020, and 2120 to attack Midway.

The two things to remember are: attack outfield hexes before combat units, and always move onto as many outfield hexes as possible.



The Hammer and the Sword

This works best against a player with a strong West flank. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport, 6 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft.

Opening Move: Same as Old Faithful.

Shooting the Gap: Same as Old Faithful with the exception of the situation where there are hovercraft and/or moon sleds in the gap. With this strategy it would be best to reveal yourself just North of the gap and use your armored sleds to take out the opposing units. This will eliminate a force that could harass your rear later, and the sight of your armored sleds may panic your opponent into attempting a total conversion defense.

The Attack: It is best to roll back the west flank with your armored sleds—provided there are no infantry units on the islands. If there are, hit those with your armored sleds. In either case send your armored hovercraft through as soon as possible. It is also best not to leave your sleds on the ice, if at all possible, since combat conversion is a double-edged sword.

The Visible Hammer and the Invisible Dagger

This is for use against the player who goes overboard on the detection equip-

ment. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport carrying 1 tank, 2 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft, 3 light hovercraft.

Opening Move: The entire hovercraft force enters visible near the center of the board, and two armored sleds enter visible at 0510 and 1005, and the command sled, sled transport, and loaded tank, enter invisible at 0801. I enjoyed the look on the face of one detection-oriented player when I pulled this one on him! He thought 13 points of his initial setup was worthless. If he had costated the point value of my units, however, he would have found that there were four points worth of units remaining and figured it out. Much to his sorrow, he didn't.

Shooting the Gap: Since most of your units are visible there is no need to shoot the gap. Just make sure all the outposts are destroyed to clear the way for your invisible units.

The Attack: This is where the dagger comes in. While your hovercraft attack is in Old Faithful, your invisible force moves to 2623. There the tank is unloaded. On the next turn your tank and sled transport move to 2423 if it is open, 2524 if it is not. In either case, you then proceed to blow away Deadhorse. If neither of these bases are open, move to 2523 and convert 2423. In the first case, you get

two conversions, as well as causing units from the central battle to be diverted. It also irritates your opponent to the point of chewing the carpet to trying a stratagem like this on him.

The Two Missile Sled Offense

This is to throw your opponent a curve after using the other strategies. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 2 missile sleds with four missiles each, 2 armored sleds, 1 hovercraft transport, 6 armored hovercraft.

Opening Move: Same as in Old Faithful.

Shooting the Gap: Same as Old Faithful, except if detected the missile sleds should fire as soon as they are within range of units on the islands, or the oilfields.

The Attack: Here is where the missile sleds come in. If your units are still undetected move them to 2019. When your turn comes destroy any units on either island. In the movement phase, move two of your hovercraft each to 2122, 2222, and 2322, your command sled to 2021, and your hovercraft transport to 2321. The missile sleds move to 2121 and 2221. The missiles, with the hovercraft's attacks and the fact that they are sitting on two oilfields, should give you the game.

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GAME DESIGN: Theory and Practice

Part XIII: Playtesting

by Nick Schuessler and Steve Jackson

Playtesting is the process of playing a new game design, over and over, in order to spot flaws and improve playability. The importance of playtesting in the production of a finished game design cannot be overstated. Ninety percent of all game defects could have been corrected by satisfactory playtesting. There is no excuse for failure to playtest a design thoroughly before putting it on the market: it indicates either gross ignorance, total apathy, or an absolute lack of interest in giving the gamer his money's worth.

Good playtesting takes time and goes through several stages. But, like research, it is an unavoidable part of the design process. A company or designer that is unwilling to playtest games should be in another line of work — it's that simple.

The techniques used below, with variations, are used at one time or another by every professional designer and company. The advanced stages are often skipped — to the detriment of the final product — but it all starts with the designer's own testing.

Designer Playtesting

This is the first stage of playtesting. You've got a basic set of rules (typed legibly), a map, counters, and whatever else you need. Find one friend (or however many it takes for the game) and play it with him. At this stage, you should not yet be relying on the rules. Just tell him how to play. Both of you will be referring to the rules as necessary, but verbal instructions are a big time-saver. At this stage you're testing the system, not the actual text of the rules.

Play through as many times as you can. Whenever a problem crops up, make a note. Unless you run into a really bad glitch, it's best to play out each game with the rules you started with, rather than changing in mid-game. After each game finishes, discuss the notes, and decide what rule changes are necessary for the next game.

In playtesting, you are trying to build a game that meets several criteria:

(1) **Balance.** All players should have an equal chance to win. In cases where one side must inevitably be wiped out or driven away, use a "victory point" system to allow a good player to claim victory when

his forces managed a good showing in defeat.

(2) **Variety.** The game should not be predictable. The longer it takes for the players to optimize their game strategy, the better. If you find that there is one best way to win, seriously consider changing the rules. Otherwise, your final product may be boring.

(3) **Realism.** As a rule, a game becomes less playable as it becomes more realistic. The type of game will determine the amount of realism your gamers will require (or tolerate) in general, historical games are expected to be more complex, and therefore more realistic, than small ones. A game that plays quickly and well can get away with less realism than one whose mechanics are cumbersome.

By the playtest stage, you will already have decided how much realism you want; your research and original drafts will have been appropriately detailed. Playtesting will tell you (a) whether your attempts at realism have made the rules too cumbersome, and (b) whether the game *really* is realistic. An example from my own experience: The counter values, combat rules, etc., of *One Page Ridge* have very little detail — they are not highly "realistic." This was deliberate, for simplicity's sake. My objective was to write simple rules that nevertheless attracted to give a course of play similar to that of the actual Ardennes offensive. Playtesting of the first version proved this was not working out. Therefore, the rules were changed — not made more complex, just changed — and tested again. Eventually a game was achieved in which the use of historical strategies will give very nearly historical results. It is therefore reasonable to assume that changed strategies will mirror the "historical" effect of use of those strategies on the battlefield, which is what simulation is all about. And extensive playtesting was necessary to achieve this.

(4) **Playability.** This is an omnibus term, taking in many things: rules clarity, speed and ease of play, "intuitiveness" of each turn and of the game as a whole, and the whole gestalt of the game. The nastiest thing you can say about a game is that it's unplayable. An unplayable game is a failure, pure and simple.

Rules clarity will be checked in the blindtesting stage, but start on it now. Any time your first playtesters tell you they can't understand what they've read — listen!

Speed and ease of play will become quickly apparent. If you spend more time looking up rules and doing bookkeeping than you do moving counters — if you have to move lots of counters in very predictable fashion — if information is not centralized and cross-referenced — people are less likely to play the game.

As for interest: the harder it is for you to keep your playtesters playing, the less interesting your game is!

A buyer usually expects playability in inverse proportion to realism. Therefore, fantasy and SF are expected to be more playable than historical, and small games will usually be more playable than large ones. Even its designers admit that the historical *mountainous Campaign for North Africa* is not meant to be played — just admired for its research — but people buy it anyway!

If you want a successful game, give your buyer at least as much realism as he expects from that "class" of game, and LOTS more playability — or vice versa — and he'll love you.

Blindtesting

When you feel that you have the rules the way you want them, and that the game works, you're ready for the second stage of playtest: blindtesting. The essence of blindtesting is that new playtesters are exposed to the game without the benefit of advice from the designer or other experienced players.

The purest form is blindtesting by mail: send off copies of the rules and all other materials to friends (game clubs, etc.) in other parts of the country. Ask them to play as many times as they can, and to send their results, rule questions, and general reactions back to you.

A modified blindtest can be achieved by recruiting some new local playtesters, handing them the game, and watching... quietly. Simply explain that you want to see whether the rules are good enough for them to figure the game out without help. You can learn more from watching a blindtest session than you can if you work by mail, but it's hard to resist the temptation to explain things, correct illegal play, or bowl players out for misreading something you thought was totally clear.

Whichever way you do it, blindtesting is necessary. It will tell you which of your rules are ambiguous or unnecessary. It may also reveal some strategies you hadn't considered, or (if realism is a cri-

tion) bring up problems then. Strongly, some of the biggest companies don't blindtest much, if at all (or don't listen to the blindtester?). I can tell which ones they are, just by reading the rules they print. So can you; they're the games that don't quite work, and raise questions they fail to answer.

Proof Playtesting

This is the last stage of playtest — the stage that is omitted by almost every company, and the stage that would eliminate 95% of the "errata sheets" in the hobby if manufacturers would just take the time.

Unfortunately, time is money — and the very nature of proof playtesting requires an extra delay of two weeks to a month before the game is published.

Proof playtesting is an extra stage of blindtesting and another round of designer playtesting . . . using only "proof copies" of the finished rules, maps, and charts. In other words, once the game is totally ready to print, and all of the final art and pasteup is done — once everything is ready for the printers — you stop right there, make a dozen copies, and playtest again.

If you've done everything right so far, there will be no design flaws left at this stage. What you'll catch with proof playtesting are the killer typographical and pasteup errors: a town left off the map, a line left off a chart, a paragraph left out of the rules — or just a number typed wrong, missing up your setup rules or your victory conditions. These small errors can drive players mad — and more proofreading won't find them all! Proofreaders are good at finding unspelled words and sentences that end in the middle. They're not good at noticing total omissions. You, the designer, might notice an omission . . . but by now you're so familiar with the game that you see what you expect to see.

Proof playtesting is the answer. Make those proof copies and turn some new playtesters loose on them. If your basic design is good, they'll be playing just as though they had bought the game in a store. And when (not if, but when) they run into a rules typo, you'll still have time to fix it. No player frustration, and no expensive, embarrassing errata sheets.

Special Problems

The easiest game to playtest is a game where both sides have identical forces, attacking on a symmetrical map. More complicated setups provide more richness — and correspondingly more playtest is required. Some things to watch for:

choose their own beginning forces, or build reinforcements, according to some kind of "point system," you must test every possible combination of forces they can achieve. Some types of units become disproportionately powerful in numbers — like the "fuzzy-wuzzy" mob attack of the GEVs in the first edition of *Open*. You may control this by making units more expensive, changing their abilities, or just limiting the counters available.

Movetemplates. If a game takes two full days to play through, you know you won't get through many playtests. Make the most of the ones you have.

Multiplayer diplomatic games. Such games can be self-balancing, in that the weaker players will combine against the strongest. Just make sure they're not too balanced. Someone needs to win eventually. *Conan's Encounter* is an example of a game with a good solution to this problem.



RPG supplements. The bigger the role-playing game, and the more material that is already available for it, the more closely a supplement must be checked. A D&D or Traveller supplement ought to be compatible with literally millions of words of existing game material.

Refereed games. If solution of some problems is left to the referee, you should playtest with many different referees to see whether things can get out of hand under some interpretations of the rules.

Playtest Techniques

Several techniques are especially valuable, both in designer playtesting and in blindtesting. The designer should try all these things, but blindtesters should be encouraged to try them too. Show them a copy of this article . . .

Try the dumb strategies. This is my biggest single piece of playtest advice; I've been saying it for years, and I'll say it for years more. Just because something seems ridiculous in real life, don't assume it won't work in your game. Try it! If your Civil War simulation consistently has infantrymen charge uphill and take entrenched positions from equal forces, something is terribly wrong. A good Civil War gamer would never try that at all — to make sure you have a couple of igno-

nant (or at least patient) playtesters to help you.

Always make good playtesters. Some of my best playtesters have been people I would never play with for pleasure. They pick at rules, find impossible meanings in simple statements, both setups — a couple of them have been cheaters. If people like this can play a game properly, without driving the others at the table totally up the wall — that game is probably airtight.

Gentlers are helpful, too. If you know any true experts in the field you're giving (even if they don't play wargames themselves), ask for their help. They'll be complimented; they'll also be useful. And a hard-core, full-time, professional fanfic gamer is the best playtester you can get. He'll play for blood, wringing every possible advantage out of the rules. And, unlike the idiot, he'll probably have some very constructive suggestions to make after he's through.

You can never playtest too many times. I think one of the reasons that micro-sized games became popular was that, being small and quick, they had often received more testing than larger games. And, as a rule, more testing means a better game. Not always! I know of a tremendously popular game that was never played by anyone but the designer until it had been published. (It's got problems, but people play it and like it.) Playtest until you drop.

Keep up with your changes. When you find an unplayable rule, note it on the rule manuscript. When your manuscript becomes illegible, retype it . . . as often as necessary. (Word processors are incredibly useful for this.) If you fail in this, your playtesters will be playing a game that has nothing to do with the rules draft you're working from. Blindtesting will catch this, if you blindtest. But I've read of one SPI project that totally bombed because the designer failed to notice that the playtesters had changed all his rules as they went along. The playtesters had a pretty good game worked out, but the designer never found out what it was . . . and his version fell flat.

Playtester Credits

I hope I've convinced you that playtesters perform an invaluable service, and are necessary aides to a professional designer. As such, they deserve appropriate recognition and compensation. Any playtesters who provide significant input should be listed in the game credits and should receive a free copy of the game. They've earned it.

Capsule Reviews



THE SPACE GAMER reviews board games, role-playing games, computer games, video games, and game supplements. We review play-by-mail games if a reviewer is involved. We will review any science fiction or fantasy game if the publisher supplies a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical wargames. TSG may publish a review of a game we are not sure — if a reader submits a review.

The staff will make reasonable efforts to check reviews for factual accuracy, but opinions expressed by reviewers are not necessarily those of the magazine.

Games for which reviews have been assigned or received include: *The End of the World*, *The Book of Alliances*, *The C&S Sourcebook*, *D&D Greenprints*, *Dragon Pass*, *Dungeon Dwe-*

erg, *Flamingo*, *High Guard* (2nd ed.), *Nebula 15*, *Letters of Oblivion*, *Swords & Sorcery*, *Thieves' Guild*, *Triplanetary*, and *Who-Dun-It*

Specific games for which we are seeking reviewers include: *Action & Strategy Games*, *Car Wars & Car Wars II*, *Dark Seas*, *The Dragonlords*, *The Hammer of Thor*, *Intelligence Sleuths*, *Ironclad*, *IPSP/ISSS Wars*, *Kang Fu 2100*, *MilSteins*, *Space Ace 21*, and *Swampfront* (2nd ed.).

APOCALYPSE (Games Workshop), \$28. Designed by Mike Hayes. Bound, with 3-page rule book, 16" x 22" board mounted in two pieces, 700 tiles, die-cut counters, 35 plastic warheads, one die. 2-4 players, playing time 2 hours up. Published 1990.

APOCALYPSE, "the game of nuclear devastation," in many ways is similar to *Risk*. Opposing forces wage war over Europe, North

Africa, and the seas around them in an effort to be the last surviving power. The map is divided into 270 regions. New armies are raised at the beginning of each player's turn, based on his position and total territory; he uses them to push new territory. Each successful attack allows the player to either build a new bomb or extend the range of a pre-existing warhead. Warheads may be used at the beginning of a player's turn to devastate one targeted region and all other regions adjacent to it. The impacted region becomes radioactive, and may not be entered until it is "radioactively clean." The combat system is innovative, with the defender required to guess the number of armies (1-6) the attacker is committing. If he guesses correctly, the attacker loses that many armies. If not, the defender loses one army. The supply system is also interesting. Each region is identified as a city, or urban, rural, mountain, water, or sea region. An additional army is generated by every city, every two urban regions, every three rural regions, etc. This system has its effects on strategy, and an empire cannot expand as much as the board. At this point, strategy is pretty well set in the old-fashioned and ubiquitous task of counting your way through the counter four times over to determine the exact number of reinforcements.

There is one gross glitch in the rules. Attacks into a sea region automatically succeed, even if from another sea region. Attacks from one sea region to another should probably be treated as per regular combat. Also, it is undesirable to call the game what one player is receiving most of the action — say 60%, or 70%. Otherwise the emphasis becomes a pain.

The graphics and component design are up to Games Workshop's usual high standard. The rules are short and clear. I would consider recommending **APOCALYPSE** if an equivalent game wasn't on the market at a cheaper price. *Risk*, as I said above, is very similar, and suggested retail is \$15.

—David Ludeman

ABBREVIATIONS

AC = author (list)

AD&D = *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*

AH = The Avalon Hill Company

AFA = amateur press association (sometimes action point allowance)

BEEM = bag-eyed monster

CHA (or CHA) = charisma

CON = constitution

CPM = control process monitor

C.P. = copper piece(s)

CR = credit(s)

C&S = *Character and Strategy*

CRT = combat results table (sometimes cathode ray tube, i.e., TV screen)

d = die (3d6 means three 6-sided die)

D&D = *Dungeons and Dragons*

DM = Dungeon master (sometimes die modifier)

DX (or DEX) = dexterity

EHP = end high point

E.P. = experience point(s) (sometimes electron game(s))

EPT = *Empire of the First Three*

FBI = Flying Buffalo, Inc.

FGU = Fantasy Games Unlimited

FRP(G) = Fantasy role-playing game(s)

GAMA = Games Manufacturers Association

GDW = Games Designer's Workshop

GN = game number

G.P. = gold piece(s)

I.P. = hit point(s)

IKK = hit to kill

IO (or INT) = intelligence

K = kilo-bytes of memory

LGM = little green man

LK = luck

MA = movement allowance (sometimes movement/matrix/mechanical aptitude/ability)

MB = monster riding

ME = magic user

NPC = non-player character

OSI = Ohio Scientific

PIM = play by mail

PET = Personal Electronic Transceiver (by Commodore)

POW = power

RAM = random-access memory

ROM = read-only memory

S&T = Strategy and Tactics

S&F = science fiction and fantasy

SR = star

S.P. = alert point(s)

SPI = Simulations Publications, Inc.

SR = strategy roll (sometimes strike roll)

ST (or STR) = strength

T&T = Tactics and Trade

TFG = Tact Fata Games

TFT = The Fantasy Trip

TR5 = Tandy-Rollec Shock

TR = TSR Hobbies, Inc. (formerly Tactical Studies Rules)

UPF = Universal Personality Profile

WB = wizard

ZOC = zone of control

DUEL ARCADE (Gamesltd, Ltd), \$3.95. Designed by John Smeaton. One 8 1/2" x 11 1/2" 20-page booklet, cards, character record sheets, strategy sheet, unprinted. Two players, playing time 5-10 minutes per combat. Published 1990.

This is a familiar outfit with a familiar format, a game of combat between wizards, introduced by a short narrative. But the resemblance to *Wizard* and its illegitimate offspring ends there. **DUEL ARCADE** concerns shape-shifters, not spellcasters, instead of Gandalf vs. Saruman, combat in this game is more likely to resemble *Madra vs. Nidius Max*, as character staff from physics to wizards to dragons to eagle on their attempts to beat their opponents.

The rulebook is well-presented, which is a necessity, in view of the complexity of the characters and their activities. A step-by-step format leads the player by the hand through filling out the intricate character record sheet.

Unfortunately, the game has some serious problems. The limited scope of the game does not justify the complexity of play. Rolling resistance in **DUEL ARCADE** can take as long as gliding out an entire round of *Wizard*. The game mechanics, with unusual dice rolling methods (white, black, blue, you've got a die), a 37/100 die), and erratic flow of play, can be frustrating. Movement, distance, and speed are abstracted, there is no tactical duplication or rules for counters or maneuvers. Combat between more than two wizards is next to impossible to perform.

I can't recommend **DUEL ARCADE** as a

game with itself; it's playable, but not worth the trouble. However, there's plenty of food for thought here concerning shaping things in various TRP magical systems, especially about item animals and acquisition of items. At \$3.95, it could be worth the price to GMs who like to tinker with their game system.

— Aaron Allgood

PRIVATEER (First Edition Graphic Art Studios, POB 41330, Sacramento, CA 95842); \$12. Designed by Scott Peterson. See inlaid roll-by die map, 12 wooden counters, one metal token, one 30" x 17" sheet of rules 2-4 pages; playing time 45 hours. Published 1978.

This game is supposed to represent the conflict and glory of piracy in the semi-mythical Spanish Main. Each player starts with three "ships" in a corner of the map. He is supposed to bring back the "treasure" located on an island in the center. Movement is controlled by dice rolls. Combat is even simpler — when you land on an enemy ship, it sinks.

PRIVATEER's greatest asset is its beautiful and flexible components. The map and counters are full-color. They even smell like the sea, and are easily worth \$12. Admiring the components, it is almost possible to forget that there is practically no strategy to this game.

Simple, but not dull, **PRIVATEER** takes almost no thought at all. A good game to bring out after the bottle has gone around a couple of times.

— Forrest Johnson

SUPPLEMENTS

THE COMPLETE TAVERN (Gambler's, 18016 Greenbush Terr., Galveston, MD

20760), \$1.95. Designed by Kerry Lloyd with Richard Meyer. 8 1/2" x 5 1/2" 24-page booklet, 11" x 17" map, sheet of cut-out cardstock furnishings, legend. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1978.

A hard day's labor of Dungeons distribution over, Bofoe the Mighty and Drufus Dwarf retire to their favorite roadside inn to unwind with some hard-core drinking and wenching. After some sensible grip gazing, of Drufus decides to try his luck at the lower Check-o-Luck game. Seeing his hand-crafted gold pieces disappear as what is obviously a rigged game, the somewhat tipsy dwarf decides it's clothing time. A fight ensues, the business attempt to intervene, Bofoe comes to the aid of his companion, and suddenly the entire situation has degenerated into a free-for-all brawl. What to do now? The smart game-master will pull out his copy of **THE COMPLETE TAVERN** and get down to brass tacks (or knacking). At his fingertips will be guidelines on types and percentages of tavern accommodations, employees and clientele; rules on rating games of skill and chance, such as dice, roulette, check-o-luck and arm wrestling; statistics on how much liquor can be imbued by characters and its effects upon them, and — ah, yes — a very nice system for administering free-for-all tavern brawls.

THE COMPLETE TAVERN has some nice features. The betting system is for the most part clear and manageable — unless characters get involved in dozens of individual fights all at once. Character actions, from throwing roundhouse punches to decking to grappling, are cross-referenced with opponents' actions (determined by die roll) to obtain damage points for both sides. If you duck, for example, and your opponent kicks, you take triple damage.

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... With a hissing shriek a second *Reak* leaped from the outcropping, swinging a short battlesword. Telegar snatched his shield up to catch the blow but the force knocked him flat on his back a second time. As his shoulders hit he pushed up and over his head with the shield, flinging the *Reak* away before it could tear it's eye for another by scrambling to his feet, Telegar faced the *Reak* who'd already recovered its footing & brandished its axe warily. Telegar advanced a step and leaped with his sabre tip

... as he pierced the *Reak* through, the axe smelted his helm and smashed into the Dwarf's shoulder. The mail *shiny* with blood the edge, but the shoulder was broken.

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Lords of Valletia is an adult game open to anyone 18 years of age or older living within the continental U.S. Residents of Alaska, Hawaii, Canada, or having APO/FPO addresses will only be accepted on condition that the customer realize there may be excessive postal delivery to those areas if times. All funds must be paid in U.S. currency.

GameMaster's Publishers Association
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Tell us you saw it in The Space Gamer.

ags (sorry, Doufus!). A chart at the front of the book translates characteristics from the names used in various FRP systems into those used in TCT (presumably those of *Thieves' Guild* by the same publisher). Several of the dice games are interesting, too, and are almost playable by themselves.

TCT suffers from sloppy editing. One glaring error at under *Kodette*, in which a large blank space obviously exists when an illustration of a roulette table was to have appeared, making the section useless unless you're an already familiar with the game. The section on dice also requires some familiarity with the game or some important explanations not offered. The reversing of some position names on a table in the dice-wrestling section may make several readings necessary for a full understanding of the procedure. Also, no real rationale is given for valuing a die roll twice when the game use of which is never explained, under *Intuition*. Finally, the lack of any real instructions for cutting and assembling the items on the cut-out sheet makes this component not so worthwhile.

In spite of its flaws, however, *THE COMPLETE TAVERN* should prove a valuable play aid to those FRP gamemasters who haven't the time or inclination to create from scratch every aspect of their fantasy worlds — and it can also be adapted to such diverse systems as *Thief* and *Fidlar's* & *Figlar's*.

— William A. Stribos

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE (Penguin Press, \$3.95, Designed by Donald F. Rupp and Chuck Kallenbach II. Approved for use with *Thief*, Use 311" x 310" booklet) Number of players and playing time variable. Published 1981.

What *Mercenary* did for the Army and *Navy* and *High Guard* did for the Navy, **MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE** does for the Merchant Service. The first half of the book is a complete *Mercenary*-type character generation system for merchants. The second half introduces 18 new items: weapons, ships, magical skills, robots, computers — even a transporter like *Zoo Trek*.

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE is, for the most part, extremely clear and well-organized. Several useful new skills are introduced, such as *Dodge & Speculation*, *Useful Ship Maintenance*, *Shrewd and Legal*. As with the new skills are explained as *M&M*, however, ownership or knowledge of not only basic *Thief* but *Mercenary*, *High Guard* and *Panzer's Scout & Armorer* is vital. Some elements of *empirical* resolution are unique — a stipulation may list one, two or even four points. And a *Rolling* procedure allows characters to receive additional skills — or grounds them if they fail the requirements. Guidelines are even provided on how to learn *Transporter* skill. Some of the new items of equipment are quite interesting, too (but note: some are only available at Tech 16 and above, i.e., outside the Imperium). It especially like the new computers which can have specific personalities imposed upon them.

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE has two flaws. Explanations of two of the new skills, *Jump Drive* and *Legal*, were omitted from the first printing, but an errata sheet is now available from Panzer for a \$ASE. There is no penalty slot for *M&M* characters, the rationale being (I learned from correspondence with designer Don Rupp) that the Navy promotes people to the Merchant Service as treats of war, etc. So if you desire a merchant character with plenty of skill, you'll stick with *Book 1* char-

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comes (unless the character learns the skill after leaving the service). There is some confusion, too, as to exactly when a -30M for unskilled persons attempting to operate a Transporter is applied. My correspondence with Fantasy has yet to clear this up.

No Traveller player should pass this one up.
— William A. Barton

PIECES OF EIGHT (FGU) \$4.95. Designed by Gerald Sawyer, Patrick Stewart, and Scott Hines. One 80" x 11" rulebook, Expansion kit and scenarios for *Shall and Crossbones*. Playing time indefinite. Published 1985.

This is a set of expansion rules for FGU's great role-playing game. Mentioned in this column are rules for voodoo, Indian characters and NPCs, guidelines for doctors, new rules for ships, and three game scenarios.

I personally am in favor of this supplement, it makes a step toward finishing out the extremely busy *Shall and Crossbones* game system.

Because it is consistent in organization and method with *Shall and Crossbones*, though, it shares some of the same flaws, notably clerical, sloppy writing. This supplement is useful only with the parent RPG. It should have been included in the basic game. And it will still take a few more supplements of this nature before *Shall and Crossbones* is really an adequate system.

Recommended to those who have bought and liked the original RPG. Consider, though, if *Shall and Crossbones* is akin to a 16-chapter book with 8 chapters missing, and each of those supplements provides 1 or 2 of the missing chapters, this will become an expensive game.
— Aron Altman

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST (Gadon/Godt), \$3.95. Designed by Michael Hoviss. Approved for Dungeons & Dragons. 16-page 8 1/2" x 11" booklet. Softcover, playing time 1-2 hours. Published 1975.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST is a solitary Dungeons scenario designed to accommodate from 1-4 1st or 2nd level characters of any class or race. It's called **SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST** because it's a good way to get rid of any really weak 1st or 2nd level characters.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST uses a page and number solution system, similar to Metzger's *Microquest* series. Thieves, Assassins, Mages, Rangers, and Paladins go through the dungeon as fighters. However, each gets a special ability because of his class. Clerics, Druids, Illusionists, and Magic Users are limited to using spells. The use of magic items is restricted.

The scenario is a good way for the low to average beginning characters to gain exp., treasure, magic items, or even a chance to improve their characteristics. Although good for weak characters, **SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST** is a hassle for stronger-than-average characters. The dungeon is very simple, making rapping unnecessary. Lastly, the pages include a lot of unneeded paragraphs — you never can enter them unless you happen to go in the wrong number. Instant death for your character is a little too high a price to pay just because you happened to missed the dice rolls.

If you want an easy way to advance characters to 1st or 2nd level, along with grabbing treasure and magic items along the way, get **SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST**. But if you want a real challenge stick to your local D&D.
— Patrick V. Krout

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- No. 17. GEV designer's intro, strategy for Child: 1, variants for Imperium, Melta, and a combination Opdr/Rpts variant. WarpWar feature.
- No. 18. IceWar designer's intro, variant scenarios for Invasion: America and War of the Ring, additional equipment for Traveller, reworked Melta, "Reforce, Gothic Thrift" (two-player GM technique).
- No. 19. POND WAR; variant aids and scenarios for GEV; combining Imperium and WarpWar; Battletalk Mini variant; reviews of Swords & Sorcery, Roonquist, and Roonking; MicroGame design article.
- No. 20. Olympia intro; Pirates in Traveller; TARTARS & MARTYRS, Reality in Melta; designer's optical rules for Ice War, designer's article on Starships & Spacewar, "Rap-Off Blast" (swagging inside).
- No. 21. Interview with Dave Atkinson, running a MicroGame tournament; tactics for Opdr and GEV; spaceship maintenance; Black Hole variant rules, porting the Demos into Melta; more reviews.
- No. 22. Ice War tactics, Black Hole physics; PARTY RAWL, 1978 SF/Fantasy game survey results, Fantasy Top short story.
- No. 23. Invasion of the Air Eaters designer's article, Opdr meets Ice War, Skiffs & Stones expansion, Vikings and Yalds in The Fantasy Top.
- No. 24. Black Hole designer's intro; "The Psychology of Wargaming", Naval Melta; "The Four-Hourer Defense in Opdr", variants for Child: 1, The Cosmos that Are Shoggyak, and John Carter of Mars.
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- No. 30. KUNG FU 2100, Fantasy Fantasy Manifesto Part II, Index in Game Artists; Game Design Part 4, Programmable Calculators, 16 pages of reviews.
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- No. 37. Gaming the Alien, Hybertan Rule, Improved Mazon, Resolution for Pirates in the Galaxy, Troubles in Valera, Cosmos Encounter Review, FGU Company Report; Winners of the Weapons Contest; Ten Deadly Sins Part II, and 6 pages of reviews.
- No. 38. 1980 Game Survey Results, Designer notes for The Lords of Underskiff, Used ships for Traveller, Selling Your Game Article, Report Q&D and Tame War reviewed; Combination Game Contest, The Complaints Department; and 7 pages of reviews.

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THE VANGUARD REACHES (Parade Press), \$3.50. Designed by Chuck Kufner/H. II. Approved for use with Traveller, One 6" x 8 1/2" 28-page booklet with 11" x 17" sector map insert. Published 1981.

THE VANGUARD REACHES is Parade Press' first approach-to-Traveller star sector. It fits in between the Imperial (2 sector) and the Spiced March (2 sector) (Spiced March) and encompasses 16 new subsector and several star and independent star sites. These include Zhodani, Beyond, Atlas, Veig and even Solaraan class stars and the independent Alarax Confederation and Edyat Ministry, the latter two populated by the busy, humanoid Musians and the amphibious Eabli respectively. VANGUARD REACHES presents information on each individual planet per subsector in essentially the same format as GDM's The Spiced March, tapping maps, universal planetary profile and other pertinent data. One page is devoted to each subsector, with supplemental information located in the library data section. The first map clearly delineates each subsector, locating specific planets, jump routes, capitals and other areas of interest, such as the Helix Nictus.

VANGUARD REACHES has several features of interest to the devoted Traveller player. The sector is a veritable melting pot of the best of the Traveller system. The proximity of so many different stars on one page may complicate, as can the presence of such concepts as the starworld of Alisa Tangle and a (Dyonic) planetworld, Vanna's Planet in the Tefra subsector. Also of note is a Zhodani scenario stating the reasons of an "ancient star's star" - the choice of individual subsector maps appear the planetary data there are at first, but I've found the complete sector pull-out map more useful than the individual map, especially when traveling between subsectors. All subsector boundaries are clearly marked on the map so there's no confusion as to where a star is or on happens with Judge Galley's Ley Star.

The only problem I found in VANGUARD REACHES was color. On some of the subsector, the planetary data was so long it was apparently necessary to place comments on the subsector utility back with the library data, creating a bit more page flipping than I would have liked. And it would have suited for even more information, given that I am, on the Mazon, the Dylar, the tamannishly unaccounted-but-not-clarified-upon serpentine both and other aspects of this part of the galaxy.

I highly recommend THE VANGUARD REACHES to all Travellers looking for new and varied parts of call. Parade Press has produced another very professional line in this supplement and has demonstrated itself as a company to keep an eye on in the future for further Traveller-related releases.

- William A. Sverre

FLAY AIDS

CASTLE BOOK 1 (Gardner Guide), \$2.75. Designed by Bob Mendez, Ed. Davis, and Marc Bolmer. Flay and approved for G&O. One 6 1/2" x 11" booklet. Published 1978.

Fifty tables of varying shapes and sizes are presented in this booklet. Each table is mapped out on grid on thick, white, semi-transparent lac paper. Six pages of tables for the random determination of wall characteristics and defenses, room contents, used engines, and gnomes have been included. There is also a set of tables for determining the owner of the castle and his or her followers. The tables can produce some bizarre results unless one is lucky. A help-

ful five-page battle index is located at the front of the booklet.

Castle uses maps from small walled keeps and towers to enormous fortresses and walled towns. There is no scale, the DM must supply his own.

The CASTLE BOOK has many interesting ideas in it. For the price, it's a bargain.

—*Kurt Butcherfield*

VILLAGE BOOK I (Judges Guide), \$3.75. Designed by Bill Davis and Marc Sumner. Play and approved for D&D. One 64-page 8 1/2" x 11" booklet. Published 1978.

Within the pages of this booklet forty-eight small villages are clearly mapped out in gray on cream millimeter hex paper. The layout of each village is believable and well planned. The surrounding terrain is left purposefully sketchy so that the referee may fit the village into his own campaign with as difficulty as he. There are also nice pages of helpful tables for the random generation of things such as population, technological level, wall defenses, and shops. There's even a large set of tables for randomly naming your villages. All of these tables must be used with great care and discretion on the part of the referee as some rather strange results can pop up if caution is not exercised. I recommend that the referee just choose from the tables instead of bothering to roll the dice. In the end it'll probably make more sense and save the poor DM constant dice juggling.

If you're one of those judges who hates to spend a lot of time mapping and planning out a village, or if you often find yourself needing out on the spot at the moment, then this booklet is for you.

—*Kurt Butcherfield*

COMPUTER GAMES

ATTACK FORCE (Big Five Software) \$14.95. Cassette for the 16K TRS-80 Level I Model II. (\$17.95 for 32K disk.) One player; playing time 35 minutes. Cannot be saved. Published 1982.

Your defending ship scuttles around a port in the enemy run-ships rear and ram in the playing field. Their flapping actually lades a life area off to one side of the screen, occasionally shooting bolts your way. As your points increase you find your own ship moving

more slowly and there are more flagships to deal with. Gradually you find yourself cornered, then overrun by missiles or blasted by a flagship and the screen clears for your next ship.

This machine language program has the usual wonderful Big Five graphics and sound. The program keeps track of the ten best scores to date and neatly handles the complexity of simultaneous acceleration. The tactics of the computer in trying to corner you are generally quite reasonable and I find the evocating pressure as your score increases prevents the game from becoming stale.

The only problem I might mention is play-balance. You get one extra power chip for every 10,000 points. That is too tough for most players. Some numbers around 7,000 might make for a better game.

This is another strong entry in the Big Five line and I strongly recommend it for any arcade buff.

—*J. Muehler*



FLYING SAUCERS (Radio Shack), \$9.55. Tape for 4K Level II TRS-80. 30 levels of play. One player; playing time 2-3 minutes per game. Published 1979.

The object of FLYING SAUCERS is to destroy as many alien saucers as possible in the allotted time. The saucers fly across the screen attempting to escape your shots. Occasionally a "space saucer" comes across the screen, and when it is hit it causes all other saucers on the screen to explode. At the bottom of the screen, mines, missiles, shots, hits, and time left are displayed. When a player dies and causes he is penalized. A score of 400 will earn extra time.

The graphics are excellent. The saucers can be guided while in flight. The player can also have multiple shots on the screen at any given point in the game. The game also forces the player to make a direct hit. Otherwise, the missile will bounce off the saucer.

Unfortunately, the display is too busy. The

player often can't tell if he got a hit. There is no sound. The game also gets boring after a while because it's too easy.

Overall, FLYING SAUCERS is OK. However, I cannot recommend it because there is a better game with the same theme (and price) on the market, Air Raid (reviewed TRS 30). —*Glass Mel*

MONEY MADNESS (Instant Software) \$9.95 16K cassette for the TRS-80. One or two players; playing time 1 hour up. Published 1980.

Two programs, Millionaire and Timber Area, are in this package. The object of Millionaire is to push \$1000 into a cushion within 15 years. You can buy and sell petroleum, trade stocks and bonds, and sell products. Timber Area is a simulation of the lumber business. You start with four million dollars and attempt to increase your net worth by buying, growing, cutting and selling timber. Forest fires, droughts, and labor strikes are some of the problems with which you will have to cope.

Timber Area is interesting. You can compete against another player or the computer. Skill and some luck are needed to beat the computer. Timber rights and land are sold at auction. Learning how much to bid is challenging. Deciding when to trim, selectively cut, or clear out the trees gives you the feel of managing your company.

Neither of these programs has sound or graphics. Millionaire soon becomes tedious once the major activity is accepting or rejecting randomly generated bids for your production.

For those interested in a business simulation, I recommend this package. Many single programs cost more. While Timber Area is of primary interest, you may also enjoy a few games of Millionaire.

—*Bruce Campbell*

STAR WARRIOR (Automated Simulations), \$19.95. Designed by J. N. Connelley. Cassette for TRS-80 Level II 16K, box, instruction manual, map and command card. (Disk version available for the 32K TRS-80 and 48K Apple.) One player; 30-40 minutes. Cannot be saved. Published 1980.

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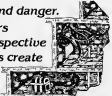
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in **STAR WARRIOR**. As a member of the Farax ("good" mercenaries) your mission is either to create a diversion (**Scout's Ore**), or to land and kill the evil robot of the planet of Farax (**Scout's Two**). Being a Farax you get to choose from three different power-ups each armed with an assortment of deadly weapons (or cannons; a mat if you have faith). There are five levels of difficulty.

These five levels are just an example of all the choices available to the player. During play, the program allows the player to input 30 different commands (6 movement commands, 6 combat commands, and 8 special commands). The game also asks you how long you want to play. The graphics are also good (much better than the **Dungeons** graphics for TRS-80). Sound is optional; it adds excitement, but slows play. The best feature is the lightning "rules." You must fight the enemy and they must fight you... that you can be fired on or be an unseen enemy.

The biggest problem with **STAR WARRIOR** is once a command is entered it can't be recalled. It is also difficult, in the cassette version, to determine if you are in flight or on the ground.

If you have the money buy the game, if you don't have the money, get the money and buy the game. Highly recommended to any warrior or arcade buff.

— Glenn Mel

STELLAR ADVENTURE Software Innovations, 320 Melbourne Rd., Great Neck, NY 11021, 16K cassette \$14.95, 32K disk \$19.95. Program by Stephen Korman for the TRS-80. One player; playing time 2 or 3 hours. Twenty levels of play. Cannot be saved. Published in 1980.

Your tiny spacecraft winds its way through hyperspace. The player gains points for landing on planets, discovering artifacts, and fighting off the Kyronan fighters and droidships. There are all sorts of clever little obstacles to

overcome. You will enjoy crapping the droid clutch of the hyperspace storm, and be pleased with the view as you drop below the event horizon into the black hole. There are hints to lead on and please to grab. Generally, it all looks like a fine-yo machine to go where no man has gone before.

The game's strongest points are in its graphics and movement. The Kyronan droidship looks threatening. The alien city on the planet is well done. Having the graphics and movement done in machine language gives the game a "you are there" flavor. The Kyronan fighters cannot be lost by simply diving into the next quadrant. The little droid games even if you slip into hyperspace.

The weak points are substantial, however. There are a couple of program bugs which can leave afterwards of your ship as you try to land. A player can rack up points by heading over and over on the same planet. Only one message actually does anything for you, and in all the games I played I never managed to find the blasted thing. Most important, since the basic techniques of heading and combat are learned, there are no new problems to challenge you.

For the price I feel this is a good buy. Certainly you will enjoy the first few hours of play. In six present states, I don't believe I'd call it a classic.

— Jon Mahoon

TIME TRAVELER (Keith Software, 21 960 Brook Dr., Steyer Brook, NY, 11750); \$24.95. Cassettes for the TRS-80, Apple II, and PET. One player, playing time many hours. Cannot be saved. Published in 1980.

You are a time traveler who is attempting to capture 14 "major" rings in 14 different eras of history. The rings give you powers far beyond those of normal man but the time machine is on the blink, so you can't count on staying for a definite period of time in any one era. Victory is achieved by bringing all 14 rings back to the time machine laboratory.

The best feature of this adventure are the use of a map and good period descriptions to try and give one the feeling he is wandering in a far time. How would you like to try to bribe your way out of prison in France 1789? How about steering the masses in Rome 10 BC?

TIME TRAVELER unfortunately falls in two critical areas. First, the four pages of documentation leave too much out. You'll play a long time just learning the parameters of persuasion, combat, and what-*no-yes*. There is no hint who you are or why you're doing what you're doing. Second, other than the descriptions, it doesn't seem to make any difference whether you're in Egypt 1350 BC or Germany 1942. Lastly, long games that can't be saved are frustrating.

Overall I'd say this game has some great ideas but fails to give the player enough information so that you can just sit down and enjoy playing. Those who delight in delving into a long game may find this enjoyable. I'd recommend you wait for their next game.

— Jon Mahoon

CONTEMPORARY GAMES

FIFTH CORPS, THE SOVIET BREAKTHROUGH AT FULDA and **HOFF GAP THE MURNBERG PINNAC** (SPI), \$9.95 each. Designed by Jim Demagis and Charles Karpis. Vols. 1 & 2 in the **CENTRAL FRONT SERIES**. Each boxed with one 32" x 34" four-color map, one 8-page EN" x 11" standard ruled book, one executive order booklet, and one die. **FIFTH CORPS** has 200 die-cut counters; **HOFF GAP** has 400. Playing time from two to 30 hours, depending on scenario. Published 1980.

It's quite a concept: take all of West Germany, split it out at a 1:250,000 scale in six separate maps, and then build a series of games around each map. When the series is complete, you have a battlesim/strategy simulation of a peacable Warsaw Pact attack on NATO forces. This is SPI's third try with a US/Soviet conflict in Central Europe (previous efforts including **NATO** and **The Next War**).

The game system is built around operation points (used for movement and initiating combat) which basically represent force, and friction points which accumulate from expanding operation points, initiating combat, and at combat results. Each player may have an unlimited number of phases per turn, the turn ends when both players finally pass. Six friction points and a unit is dead.

Despite the detailed point system, it's basically move-fight. If either the Soviets or the NATO forces want to burn attractiveness out quickly with additional moving and lighting, they can. The closest to LVH, including electronic counter-measures (ECM), chemicals, and tactical nuclear weapons. The Soviets clearly have the more interesting play with offensive movement, *Manoeuvre*-type options, and some interesting special rules for a fast-turn surprise effect. The NATO types are pretty well constrained to a "play the line" role, awaiting their reinforcements. Later volumes will probably include some of the REFORGER deployments, allowing NATO counter-offensive capabilities.

CENTRAL FRONT is a "simulation" and strictly for the hardcore NATO types. The mechanics take some getting used to, and even though plenty of contacts are available in the current games, the theme should be approached as a 10-map wargame to be fully realized — with a final price tag probably in excess of \$100. It's SPI's best effort to date in this area, and the intended audience should be well pleased.

— Nick Selousville

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GAMESMAN



Letters

After some of the various "articles" I've seen in various zines regarding various game companies who just happen to advertise in our zine, where the review on article made like an other advertisement, it's actually nice to see you take a chance and advise everyone on the state of *Lord of Valeria*.

Thank you for publishing Prof. M.A.F. Bunker's letter, I've been considered KFT to be one of the best role-playing games around.
Mark Goldberg
Chicago, IL

Since I'm not into D&D, I just browsed through Aaron's article (Issue 38), but I was able to find it my way into my collection because of the review. In fact, except that the figure is so good now, TSG is primarily reviews to me. In more than a few cases I've bought games because the subject or mechanics appealed to me and they got good (not necessarily favorable, but unbiased and complete) reviews in TSG. In fact, I consider TSG recommendations just behind the recommendation of a friend who played the game. (It's getting too expensive to go on type or box set anymore.)

Ron Fisher
Arlsville, NC

I enjoyed the article, "Moons for Novice Dungeon Masters" in TSG 35. Very useful for the reason at which it was aimed, and combining it with an "Oh yeah!" for more experienced DMs.

Having seen this article, I am inclined to suggest a few more sources. There are a number of magazines oriented toward history, archaeology, natural history, etc., which can be helpful. The more obvious of these is *National Geographic*. Any self-respecting history should have back issues and index volumes.

And (D&D) one's to be more obscure), the books of David Morley's *The Last Christmas*, mislabeled *Mansions* brought me his books, *Castle* and *Pyramid*. I advise any game masters to seek them out (and his other books, *Cathedral*, *City*, and *Underground*) and check them out. Though classified as children's books, you will find them interesting, if not useful.

Dr. V. Klopper
St. Louis, MO

Thank you for the recent "plug" in your magazine of my new magazine, *Marginal Cosmopolitan*. However, my magazine is NOT open to a general subscription. I operate privately and I send out copies on a postpaid basis. Therefore, readers, do NOT send me an order, for I shall have to return it. Thank you.

R. A. Faux
Washington, VA

Your "Cardboard Heroes" are the answer to a long-standing problem! I'm a DAD enthusiast and a school teacher who has been "upgrading the news" for quite a few years now. Games are more fun in three dimensions, but the figures — 1 Your product is ideal for my purposes. Thank you! I just bought out the entire fantasy shipment at the hobby shop

Henry A. Ott
New York, NY

I appreciate your encouraging my reviews on "off the wall" and hard to find games, but sometimes you can get yourself into a very disappointing predicament. As an example, as you can see, there are no reviews included with this letter. This is mainly because the game I had intended to review, *Ripper Battle*, was so bad that it wasn't worth the effort.

The game may even have some unique ideas — but they are lost in its terrible rules. From what I have gathered, the players are supposed to use simultaneous movement and fire, but when I read that, I can understand very little. There are no victory or gravity effects that would have made the game more interesting. Nothing new is attempted.

I would hate to see someone waste good money on this game.

Jerry Eppstein
Orinda, NE

SF RPG SUPPLEMENTS

Twilight's Peak	..	6.3 (19.95)
76 Futures	..	7.5 (21.95)
Bright Pass(Mithril)	..	7.4 (15.15)
Rift Guard	..	7.4 (6.45)
Miscorony	..	7.4 (3.95)
Research Station Games	..	7.3 (11.95)
Shadow/Annis News	..	6.7 (17.95)
Tactical	..	6.6 (26.15)
Sector 87	..	6.5 (36.75)
Dray's Station	..	6.1 (13.95)
Eye Sector	..	6.0 (22.95)
Encounters in the Phoenix Quadrant	5.9 (19.35)	
Pen-Loon's World	..	5.7 (28.45)
SpaceWarrior's Guide to Alien Moons	5.5 (18.75)	
The Evening Star	..	2.0 (34.45)

FANTASY TACTICAL GAMES

Melno	..	7.6 (1.45)
Wizard	..	7.6 (3.35)
Swashbuckler	..	6.8 (8.75)
King of the Mountains	..	6.6 (32.65)
Arms Law	..	6.5 (36.35)
Walden	..	6.0 (25.35)
Valkenburg Cards	..	5.8 (11.85)
Hero	..	5.6 (34.75)
Stomp	..	5.5 (9.35)

FANTASY STRATEGIC GAMES

War of the Ring	..	6.8 (4.65)
Divine Right	..	6.3 (8.35)
Lords of the Middle Sea	..	6.3 (19.75)
Dragon Lords	..	6.0 (34.85)
Spellbreaker	..	5.7 (18.35)
Lords & Wizards	..	5.4 (34.35)
Swords & Sorcery	..	5.3 (5.35)

The Beastlord	..	4.8 (12.85)
Zarg's Lords	..	4.6 (32.75)
Demons	..	4.7 (6.55)
Barbarian Kings	..	4.5 (11.65)
Knights & Knaves	..	4.3 (32.65)

FANTASY BOARD GAMES

Juans	..	6.8 (22.95)
Wizard's Quest	..	6.3 (7.25)
Dragon	..	5.6 (44.65)
Death and Destruction	..	5.0 (27.55)
Fantastic Encounters	..	5.0 (38.35)
Mythology	..	4.8 (14.25)
Magic Realm	..	4.6 (6.95)
Darkover	..	4.1 (12.85)
Titan	..	4.0 (30.35)
Hunters of Thor	..	3.3 (33.15)

FANTASY RPG

The Fantasy Trip	..	7.7 (2.35)
Basic Quest	..	7.5 (3.75)
Land of the Rising Sun	..	7.2 (29.35)
Thieves' Guild	..	7.2 (31.35)
Infinity	..	6.7 (33.35)
Advanced Dungeons and Dragons	..	6.3 (1.85)
Complete Wizard	..	6.3 (1.85)
Clarity & Sorcery	..	5.9 (7.85)
DragonQuest	..	5.9 (4.35)
Wizard	..	5.7 (11.35)
Odyssey	..	5.6 (31.35)
Mythic Moments	..	5.5 (5.85)
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DarkMaze	..	5.2 (16.45)
High Fantasy	..	5.1 (22.65)
Advantage in Fantasy	..	4.7 (22.65)
Arden Gamble	..	4.5 (14.75)

Errata

1980 GAME SURVEY

In the final portion of issue 38 (see "Where We're Going" in this issue) a column of type was omitted from the listing of survey results. Not good... At any rate, here are the missing numbers.

SF BOARDGAMES

Cosmic Encounter	..	6.3 (6.95)
Dune	..	6.3 (3.05)
Space Pattern	..	6.3 (41.35)
Quik	..	6.0 (53.95)
Dr. Who	..	5.6 (30.75)
4th Dimension	..	4.3 (13.85)

SF RPG

Tarvos	..	7.8 (1.45)
Space Opera	..	7.4 (17.95)
Space Quest	..	6.1 (29.45)
Villains & Vigilantes	..	5.9 (18.65)
Gamma World	..	5.7 (8.75)
John Carter	..	5.7 (6.45)
Space Patrol	..	5.7 (19.75)
Star Wars & Spacemen	..	5.5 (16.55)
Supershero 2044	..	5.3 (13.85)

Every four weeks I get a bulletin from the Science Fiction Book Club. Why isn't there a Science Fiction Game Club?

No, really. The industry is growing rapidly enough to support an independent distribution outlet handling all computer SF and fantasy releases on a club system. Members who join would get a free copy of a MicroGame or some other small-scale introductory game (what SF gaming needs is a good answer to *Napoleon at Waterloo*), and every month or two months thereafter they would get a flyer announcing that month's new release plus mentions of booklet games still available. Members who don't return a flyer by a certain deadline would automatically be shipped a copy of the featured selection and billed accordingly.

The obvious objection now is, "The companies wouldn't want a club because it would cut into their own sales operations." Maybe, but maybe not. Book publishers don't object to the SF Book Club, because it's already made and cheaply-priced advance appeal to a different market than most expensive hardcover or cheaper paperback. The same strategy might apply to games. If the game club prints its own cheap versions of mass-market games. This is what SPI does with *Strategy & Tactics* magazine, apparently. It finds that games who like the magazine version of a game will buy the more durable mass-market version, or that the two audiences don't overlap sufficiently to make a difference, or some other reason. Anyway, SPI has shown that a cheap and an expensive version of the same game can coexist.

Another reason why a game club wouldn't

necessarily cut into company sales is that, of necessity, a club would deal in only a specific price range. You couldn't offer *King Of The Hill* one month and then *Freelance In The Galaxy* the next — the price range is too wide. The SF Book Club offers two new releases each month as featured selections, with prices totaling about eight or nine dollars, because of the smaller scope of its hobby, a game club would probably only offer one game each month, still in that night or two-dollar range. Consequently, that as the range of complexity for a game that can be learned easily and partly will "played out" in a month, before the next release arrives.) If the club proved successful, it might gain a large majority of the audience for the mid-level game, but the companies would still have the high-price and the "niche" game market to themselves.

A third reason why companies wouldn't object to a game club is that they would be paid by the club for the right to market their product. Designers might have to negotiate their contracts to provide for benefits from club sale, but companies (particularly smaller companies with inadequate distribution outlets) would just hand over their games to the club for a flat fee and/or royalty, and let the club do all the work of distribution. The club thing about a club is that there is a certain guaranteed amount of sales on every release. The SF Book Club never sells less than 25,000 copies of any featured selection, and what games could not achieve such a figure at the same format (if ever), there would still be a four-figure of sales on every new release.

A game club would have several possible advantages. It would produce good games by interested companies. It would recruit new people to the field, just as the Book Club has introduced many people to read science fiction who wouldn't have otherwise. It would help large-scale games to reach a wider audience through cheap editions. Eventually it might even give designers a new market for their games, the Book Club sometimes buys collections from writers without an interesting publisher.

However, there are several disadvantages. A new game club would have to have considerable initial capital, since it can expect to operate at a dead loss for the first year or two of operation, until it catches on. Companies would likely be reluctant to present anyone to produce cheap versions of their games, despite the benefits outlined above. Most importantly, it may prove hard to even find one good mid-sized SF or fantasy game to market each month!

But I believe none of these objections are insurmountable. What we're discussing here is essentially the same thing that *Star* magazine profits each month, with a couple of important differences: (1) a club would allow releases from many different companies, (2) you would have a choice whether to reserve a particular game instead of taking the bulk of the draw, and (3) you wouldn't have to wait through all that bad fiction every month.

I think the field is about ready for a Science Fiction Game Club. How about you?

Allen Varney
Reno, NV

News & Plugs

Does Amazon appear that he sat with TSR has finally been settled. Amazon currently has his own company, Adventure Games, Inc., which markets *Adventure In Fantasy*.

METAGAMING NEWS: Metagaming has announced the upcoming release of *The Fantasy Master's Guide*, an index to all Fantasy Trip publications. A new *Codes* will be issued in October. Price: \$9.95. Also to be available is a reference screen for TTT, priced at \$2.95.

Other upcoming releases include *Command & Conquer War*, *War's War* (continued), *The Air Strike Strike Back* is sequel to *Assault on the Air Station*, and *A Fiasco of Turkeys*, a "satirical" micro-sized game.

Rumor: An Apple IV computer is currently in development.

We hear rumors of something called *The Glory Game*, evidently is an alternative for those Christian gamers who feel that D&D is "evil."

The Conflict Simulations Game Club (5335 Lester St., Indianapolis, IN 46228) publishes *Command Zone*. Price: \$6/issue (mass), single copy \$3.

Gameshop has changed its name to Nova Game Design, Inc. Upcoming releases include a number of game based on the *Age of Stone* system: a WWII air game, another WWII game, *Seventy Seveners* (Old West) and *Crossed Swords* (Unlabeled). They are also planning to publish a multi-player boardgame, *Adri and Adria*.

Magnetic Fanzine (1636 N. Wilson No. 403, Hollywood, CA 90028) is a bi-monthly journal, devoted to the art of Computerized Fantasy Simulations. Price: \$2.95/copy.

Wpk Fanzine is a new magazine devoted to *Warhammer*. See ad in issue.

The *Armsy* produces a plastic "dice mat," which takes all the skill out of dice rolling (but keeps them on the table). Price: set \$9.95 (small), \$19.95 (large), \$39.95 (tournament).

Games Workshop has announced three forthcoming releases: *Thril Tower*, *Star Muncher* and *Death Cam*.

Judith Gullik has a new magazine, *The Imperial Gazette*, including SF and Fantasy game articles and reviews. Price: run 5,000, unsubscribe distribution 3,000. Payment to contributors: \$1-\$7/page for copy, \$2-\$10 for art. Editors: Mike Rogan and Gerald Kahn.

FGU has bought the following titles from Phoenix Games: *Aftermath* (for release in May), *Elementary*, *Warrior* (upcoming version due in June), and *Reveler* (second edition for July).

Billy Associates has released an "International Trade Ledger" and a "Player Character Checklist" to add to its line of record sheets and play aids. A pad of 50 sheets of either costs \$2.50.

Progressive International offers *Mythos*, a 32K program for the TRS-80. Price: \$34.95.

The *Prose/Video* Project is a group of SF fans, writers and artists who are seeking to create a new TV series. Queries should be sent with an SASE to: Russell Coody, 3025 Ryan St., Dept. 154, Lake Charles, LA 70601.

The World Space Federation (POB 383, Greenwood, MO 64038) is a citizens' group lobbying in support of the space program. Send an SASE for further information.

Automated Simulations has released a package including three of its games — *The Destruction of Ryn*, *Master's Tower* and *Knight at Risk*. Price: \$49.95.

House of Pigeon, a new company, has announced the release of the boardgame *Space Road*.

James E. Lurvey (POB 27, Belovest, MD 28136) offers the scenario *Star General*. Price: \$7.50/12 issues, or 75 cents/copy.

Calendar

- May 1-3 **SISACON '83** Gaming con for SFAP, SF, and kousipquing at University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL. Contact Leo Vachal, 2836 Layton Dr., Mobile, AL 36688.
- May 22-25 **GRINCON III** SF&F gaming con, Oakland Hotel House, 435 Hesperidge Road, Oakland, CA 94612. Contact P.O. Box 4153, Berkeley, CA 94706.
- May 29-31 **COMPUTERFEST '81** Computer hobby show. SASE to NAAC, P.O. Box 26265, Columbus, OH 43220.
- June 5-7 **DALCON '81** Gaming con - several tournaments, drinks, etc. Contact Dalton '81, 12860 Alhambra Rd., Dallas, TX 75243.
- June 5-7 **PHORINGCON 2** SF fan con, including T&T tournament. Contact PhorCon, Inc., P.O. Box 128, Torrey, AZ 85281.
- June 12-14 **MEG MICHCON 10 GAMBFEST**. Contact Metro Detroit Gamers, P.O. Box 783, Troy, MI 48069.
- June 19-21 **STRATACON III** Boardgaming, miniature, SF, and RPG. Contact G. Patterson, 5373 Coatesville St., Vancouver, BC V5P 3N4.
- June 26-28 **GAME CON ONE**. Contact Gene Aronson, 481 Perry St., Salem, OR 97301.
- July 3-5 **GRIZZLES '81** To be held in Irvine Moral, San Marcos, CA. Contact Dwight '81, P.O. Box 5823, San Jose, CA 95150.
- July 9-12 **1981 SF&F NATIONAL CONVENTION**. Staff model con. SASE to Ed Conroy, 29 Matthew St., South Fallsbrook, NY 11735.
- July 11-13 **MINNESOTA CAMPAIGN FIVE**. Contact Mr. Jeff Berry, 343 E. 19th St. Apt. 48, Minneapolis, MN 55448.
- July 16-19 **CWA-CON '81**. Wargaming & education-gaming con. Contact P.O. Box 16397, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, IL 60616.
- July 17-19 **ODYSSEY '81**. Con featuring all kinds of gaming. Sponsored by the UNEI Simulation Games Club, for information contact R. Bradford Chant, UNH&SC, Memorial Union Building, Durham, NH 03824.
- July 17-20 **9th ANNUAL FLYING MUFFALO CONVENTION**. Contact P.O. Box 1463, Scottsdale, AZ 85252.
- July 23-26 **GINCON EAST**. Contact at P.O. Box 139, Middletown, NJ 07748.
- July 23-August 2 **MAINECON**. Boardgaming, miniature, FRP. Contact Mr. John Winkler, Director, Maincon, 100 Front St., Bath, ME 04530.
- July 24-August 2 **NANCON III-VI**. General gaming con. Send SASE to Nan's Game Headquarters, 118 Braegrove Center, 6100 Westchase, Houston, TX 77057.
- August 8 **DRAGONHEAT IV** SF&F gaming con. Chelsea Town Hall, Kings Road, London SW3.
- August 8-9 **5th ANNUAL BARKING AREA WARGAMERS CONVENTION**. Contact Edward F. Stevens, Jr., 83 N. Main St., Rockledge, MA 04841.
- August 13-16 **GENCON XIV**. FRPG & new gaming releases. Contact GenCon XII, P.O. Box 736, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.
- September 3-7 **DEMVENTION TWO**. SF con. Contact Demvention Two, P.O. Box 12545, Denver, CO 80211 or (303) 433-9374.
- CONVENTION ORGANIZERS** - let us know about your con! Free publicity never hurts.

The Good Guys by JD




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BUMPER STICKERS

Steve Jackson to the TSG subscribers, greetings —

Four or five years ago, back in the Dark Ages, when I still spent more time playing games than trying to design them, I wasted a couple of weeks making up some bumper stickers. I had a few thousand printed up on heavy vinyl (the kind that outlasts the bumper it's on) . . . and, for a while, I'd sell them at conventions. Paid for my meals that way, anyhow.

When I get really involved in game design, I stick the stickers into a closet and forget about them. Well, last week I ran into them again. I figured (since I've got them anyway) I might as well put in an ad and see if anyone else out there has the proper twisted sense of humor to enjoy them.

Most of them, obviously, are Trekkie-type. A couple aren't. I've noticed that very few people understand the Cthulhu one — but those that understand like it . . .

All stickers are EXACTLY TWICE THE SIZE SHOWN.

Anyway: send me a check and I'll send you some stickers. If you want to combine this with a game or magazine order, go right ahead.

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